

• POWER •

ARTHUR STRINGER

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P O W E R



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By ARTHUR STRINGER

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AUTHOR OF

"Are All Men Alike and The Lost Titian," "The Door of Dread," "The City of Peril," "The Gun Runner," "Phantom Wires," "The Prairie Wife," "Never Fail Blake," "The Under Groove," "The House of Intrigue," etc.



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*To*

DAVID CROMBIE

My patient guide and much imposed upon boss  
when I pretended to be a railroad man on the  
old Père Marquette

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P O W E R



# POWER

## CHAPTER I

I'VE got to talk or hit the grit. I've got to blow off or blow up. For I'm like a big "mikado" backed into a roundhouse where they've forgotten to draw my fire. They tell me to rest and take things easy. But you can't sit pretty on a hot crown-sheet. You can't play oyster after being a wolverine for forty years. And I'm too much of an old war-horse to enjoy holding down a willow rocker on a Pasadena piazza and watching my own blood-pressure. My clot's cleared up and I've got back the use of my right leg. I've come out of the mist and the old bean's hitting on all four again. But I've got to do something more than twiddle my thumbs and watch the tourists motor past. Like any other old war-horse, I'm never going to be happy pawing the stall planks when I've been in harness for nearly half a century.

And I've just found my safety-valve. I've spotted something to do. For I've been double-crossing the undertaker and reading my own obituary. I've been reading all about myself in that sugar-coated account of John Rusk which *The Railway World* threw into

print last month when they missed their count and expected to see me riding behind a couple of hearse-plumes. It's a nice write-up, considering what they had to work on. It reads smooth and it swallows easy. But it's all wrong. It's a pack of lies. And it's so wide of the mark that it leaves me wondering how a human chocolate éclair like that could ever get to be the president of a transcontinental system. It sounds like a home missionary report done over by a theatrical press-agent. The world may be full of roses and the roses may be full of dew—but railways aren't built of that sort of stuff. It's steel and sweat, mostly, that goes to the making of a road. It's the force of a wave and not its foam that counts.

That hand-embroidered history of my life is so wrong that I'm going to take a few weeks off and do it all over again. I'm going to locate the lost cars and get my yards cleaned up. And I'm going to do it in my own way. That will have to be a plain way, for I'm a plain man. And I want to stick to plain facts. It's the half-facts you have to put frills on, while Truth, they tell me, can still go around so naked that a liar is afraid to look at her. So for three hours every morning while the mocking-birds are singing from the pepper trees behind the Cherokee rose-trelises I'll have Wallie sit here with his pad and pencil and take down my data as it comes to me. And being a willing lad and a well-trained secretary—get that good, Wallie, for I may never say it again—by the time my youngest girl Tacita, called Tassie for short,

and I get back from our afternoon ride, he'll have it all written out on his Underwood and ready for corrections. And by the time I'm through I may have discovered why Wallie was empty-headed enough to come west with his broken-down boss when he might have moved on to a chief clerkship and thirty-five hundred a year.

Wallie is a good lad. He knows it, for he's just heard me say it for the second time. And he knows so much about this family of mine that I don't see how I'm ever going to have the courage to sack him. If I was back in the real world, where they call me a man of iron, I might be weak enough to make that young jackanapes "Assistant to the President" and put the title over the door, just because Tassie and I liked him. But he's still my secretary. And that seems to mean a lot besides railroad work. It's come to mean getting theater seats for the family and seeing the rugs are in the auto and the bills are paid and my business car is on the right siding. It includes making sure that my *chef* doesn't forget the bran muffins for breakfast and that job-hunters don't get beyond the first office and that the wife gets her Christian Science books on time and that a watchful eye is overlooking my outside investments and that my oldest girl Natalie has the right brand of roses in her drawing-room on the trip back to New York and that the usual monthly remittance gets off to Newt.

And speaking of Newt, it's going to give that boy of mine a jolt or two to find his old dad knee-deep in

an ink-well. Newt never had much respect for my mental rolling-stock. He used to make fun of my wall mottoes and tell me my Abbott's *Life of Napoleon* was all wrong in its history and a darned sight more wrong in its ethics. Maybe so! But I've a liking for those old king-makers and conquerors. They were go-getters. They did things. They fought their way to their own ends, and let somebody else do the explaining, afterward.

So if I wade out beyond my depth, the joke will be on me. Yet there's one thing in which Newt and I will always differ. I know what I'm going to talk about, before I get under way. Newt and those new-fangled writer-friends of his always impressed me as never being quite sure what they were heading for.

I may be wrong, of course. For, when I come to think it over, some of those old slogans I got off my chest in the heat of the fight may have been good whips to crack up and down the line, but might read too cocksure for the copy-books. And, now I'm sitting on the side-lines and getting a new slant on the old game as I watch it, I've concluded that life isn't so simple as the primer-writers try to make it. It's never all black and all white. It's not always win or lose. It's a tangled-up old battle-ground with a good many of the heroes carrying a white feather or two concealed on their person, and a good many of the victories on one front knocked into a cocked hat by a defeat or two on some other front. One movement seems to merge into another, and the fighter forgets what he's fighting



for, and the medal often gets pinned on the man who ought to be lock-stepping back to the guard-house, and when you're standing up to cheer for the old flag you've saved, you're probably trampling the body of a dead man who was a blamed sight cleaner fighter than you could be.

But it's about time to back out of the dust and size up the battle. I've a hankering to stand off and study the trees instead of staying lost in the woods. I want to take stock. For next week, Tassie tells me, I'll be fifty-seven years old. And forty-four of those years have gone to railroading. I've pretty well climbed up to the end of my ladder. I've linked up my last feeder and placed my last bond-issue and licked my last man. I can't help having the feeling that I've just about made my pie. I've played the game through. For, when everything's said and done, this business of railroading is a game, about the biggest game in the world. And it's the only game I'm any good at. I don't suppose it looks like much of a game to the fur-clad lady who steps into an up-to-the-minute vestibuled Limited and complains about the carnations not being fresh on the dining-car tables. *She* isn't supposed to know anything about how that road came to be there for her convenience, how money was poured out for its building, how the dollars were harvested for its maintenance, how hills were cut and water was spanned to link it up, how men labored and sickened and died to make its roadbed smooth, how human brains, mightier than labor or capital, keep it

an organized whole flowing with its flange-wheeled blood of life. I don't suppose all that even looks big to my own son Newt, or he wouldn't want to stay over in Oxford broadening his accent and writing high-brow essays instead of learning to handle a transcontinental system.

Well, my Newt's man-size now and his life's his own. He has his reasons, I suppose, for going the way he wants to, whether it's painting or writing. Old Bill Van Horne used to paint pictures after they'd given him a title for building the Canadian Pacific and they tell me his second-class brush-work didn't stop him from building a first-class road. But I can't help saying I pinned a lot of hope on my Newt, at one time. I expected something different from what I got. I'm not much given to sentiment, but I kind of nursed the idea I was building up something big for my son to step into, after I'd gone. I'd a hankering to see him carry on, in some way, and keep the name of Rusk where I'd put it. I tried hard enough. Even after his mother took him out of the car shops when he got a steel splinter in his eye, and even after he'd soured on inside work and quit computing coal-consumption on the Mountain Division to go off for a winter of tarpon fishing down in Florida, I still thought I could get him roped and bridle-wise and back in harness. But Newt felt he was made for finer things. He kept saying that he wanted to "express" himself. Well, I've nursed the same hankering. Only, I've done my brush-work in a different way. Instead

of drawing mountains with colored chalk I've generally blown 'em up with dynamite. Instead of painting rocks on little squares of canvas I've been satisfied to cut their hearts out, to let my trains go through 'em. Instead of filling three-by-four gilt frames with Turner sunsets I've been busy filling seven-mile muskegs and seventy-foot sink-holes with sand and gravel. And instead of writing my name down in the corner of a Nile-green landscape with a cheese-colored nude in the background, I've written it with steel rails across this wrinkled continent of ours, from ocean to ocean, with the street-globes of a hundred and eighteen new cities for high lights and a million and a half square miles of new wheat-lands for a background. To-day I'm the so-called president and the main push of the third biggest railroad system in the world. I may not look very big to that world, or even to my own son, but I notice I'm still the one and only "Rusk" in *Who's Who*. The only monument I ever asked for was this railway of mine. That's got to stand my one proof of ability. For I was never a grandstand player. I don't think I ever gave a tinker's dam how I stand or how I stood with the outside world. All I wanted was to stand big in the eyes of my own peers. You can't fool those lads. They know. I may be a fussy old man, as my Natalie had the nerve to imply I was, the other day. But I've been a builder in my time. And a bit of a fighter, now I come to think it over.

For, as I've said before, railroading in this New World of ours, all things considered, is the biggest

and keenest battle that he-men can wade into. There's only one thing bigger: and that's war itself. Our calling, once you've got an inkling of how the works go round, is the one enterprise where you'll always find a super-man on the job, the super-man making his jumps ten moves ahead of the game, always watching and countering some other super-man, fighting the blind forces of nature when he's not fighting the wolves of finance, fighting the tin-horn statesmen who follow the new game of playing football with their country's transportation systems, and fighting even his own help when they emulate the "hogger" on the front end and try to ride the old iron horse to death, by demanding more wages than there is revenue in the train.

It takes a big man to run a big road, in these days. But, when I come to think of it, these presidents and general managers seem to do their work with muzzles on. They consume their own smoke. They seem to get along without any grievance committee to justify them either to their own board of directors or to a listening world. But it might be better for all concerned, I've about concluded, if that world had a clearer idea of what the average railroad head has to face. I can remember one morning when my boy Newt and a college chum of his came down to the office to get passes for a moose-hunt up north of a new gravel pit of ours. They came for a favor, but they stayed long enough to have a laugh over my wall mottoes. Newt didn't seem to see much value in those framed phrases

of mine, "Serve to Survive" and "Steam Makes the Grade" and "Ability Always" and "Get On or Get Out." He didn't approve of them, any more than he approved of me. But they were my battle-standards. It hurt me to see him smile over the three words I kept above my desk: "Faith Is Force." For it proved that he didn't have faith in his own father. I suppose he regarded that father, in fact, as a curt-spoken rough-neck who wore baggy trousers and detachable cuffs and initialed operating-reports in his shirt-sleeves and failed to keep poetry magazines in his private car and still clung to the childish faith that some day he'd stumble on a smokable cigar for five cents. He considered me at least ten laps behind him in the race toward civilization. But that fall when my college-finished offspring was up stalking a bull-moose through a few miles of pineland, I was stalking a government concession that meant another ten million to my system, and stalking it just as craftily as my soft-handed son was stalking his forest friend with the fur on. He killed his moose and dined on the more delicate parts of it. He made a meal. But I made history. And when he was helping to make a polo score at the country club I was helping to make maps.

That, it seems to me, is the difference between the old generation and the new. We oldsters were pioneers, with a wilderness to redeem. We conquered it and linked it up with steel. And the story of our nation is pretty well the story of those steel links. It was our railroads that sewed up our ragged frontiers

and made us one. It was transportation, assured and cheap and quick, that made us possible as a united nation. And I'm the boss of one of those links, the head of a system that runs from sea-water to sea-water. That system was begun, I acknowledge, in the older era when railways were largely a law unto themselves, when the claim was apt to go to the quickest and the spoils to the strongest. But for everything I got I worked, and worked hard. It may have cut me off from some of the amusements that loom so big to the younger generation around me. But I'm not vomiting remorse. It never made me a howling success as a co-tillion leader, but it kept me down to old-fashioned, fist-on-the-table facts. It never allowed a swallow-tail coat to sit easy on my big shoulders, but it gave me the satisfaction of knowing I was in a big game. I couldn't mouth about "*L'art pour l'art*," as they put it down in the walk-up studios, but I could still dig joy out of my day's work. For through it all I felt I'd a hand in a new kind of epic, not the kind Newt's artist friends try to paint with their little camel-hair brushes, but the kind that's inscribed in steel and stone and cement and stretches from tidewater on the Atlantic to tidewater on the Pacific. What's more, it brought the wherewithal to let my girl Natalie hobnob with some of the emptier crowned heads of Europe and my boy Newt to amble up to Harvard in a twin-six sport car. But when their dad first went out in the world he hobnobbed with bohunks in a box-car; and when he first went to school through the Lower Peninsular,

pinewoods he traveled with a hickory thong around his waist to keep his blue-jean jumpers up.

And that reminds me that it's about time I was getting back to the beginning. But that, I find, isn't going to be so easy as it sounds, for I'm still ahead of something, no matter where I start. And I ought to begin, I suppose, by telling about my ancestors. But I don't seem to have had any worth mentioning. My father, William Rusk, was a New England millwright who made a failure of things in the East and became a sailor on the Great Lakes. After a few years of sailing he possessed himself of a rickety old steam-barge and ferried cord-wood from the River Thames in Ontario, to the growing young town of Detroit. His boat was called *The Alexander*. It was wrecked, one October, in the eastern shallows of Lake St. Clair. My father swam ashore, or was washed ashore, but three of his crew and about everything he owned went down with his boat. He made a living, for a few years, by digging out the roots of tamarack-trees and hewing them into ship-knees. Then he met my mother. She was 'Tina Jenner, the daughter of August Jenner, a pioneer farmer down next to the Ohio border. Old Jenner was a German. He was dead set against the marriage of his daughter to a wandering ne'er-do-well like my father. So the two ran away together. They were married in the town of Chatham, and made their return to Michigan by way of Sarnia and Port Huron. They tried farming, in a small way, a few miles west of the Nagisaw River. I

was born on this farm. Of it, however, I have no memory, as my father moved north, to a larger and rougher farm, before I was three years old. There, about a year later, he was killed by a falling tree while clearing one of his fields.

I have a vague memory of the funeral, of the bright metal handles on the coffin, of the depth of the hole into which this coffin was lowered, of my mother crying as the frozen earth was shoveled in on top of the hollow-sounding boards. On the way home somebody gave me liverwurst and fried cakes. I ate more than I ought to, when the older people's thoughts were on other things, and my childish gluttony made me sick. I grew as sad, I imagine, as the others around me, and my distressed little stomach emptied itself and I was scolded for spoiling Henry Spiedel's new buffalo-robe.

That seems to be as far back as memory goes. I know that after my father's death my mother tried to run the farm herself. She could not have been very successful, for I remember crying with the cold because I had no mittens to keep my hands warm. A neighbor's wife, whose name I can't recall, took me into her kitchen and warmed me beside the stove while she cut the worn-out feet from a pair of her son's socks and sewed them up into mittens, thumbs and all. I was very proud of them. I remember too when I was sent to the village store for coal-oil, trudging through spring slush that was ankle-deep, and being interrogated by the shop-keeper, who lifted me up on his counter, where my protruding bare toes



were solemnly inspected by the assembled lumber-jacks. They each threw a silver half-dollar on the counter and much against my will the store-keeper took off my ragged old shoes and stockings and tossed them into his wood-box. My sorrow at this robbery soon vanished, however, when I found a brand-new pair of woolen stockings pulled over my wet toes and a pair of copper-faced shoes placed about my numbed feet. It was the bright copper toes, I remember, that most captured my fancy.

Another memory, in some way mixed up with these bright copper toes, has to do with a mouth-organ, which I found one Christmas morning at the bottom of my stocking, along with a striped red and white candy cane. I could not play that mouth-organ, but there was romance in the mere sound of it. I slept with it under my corn-husk pillow and carried it about with me until the last of its little brass keys was broken off. But even at that early date I wasn't allowed to be an idler. I can still remember helping my mother drop seed-potatoes along a furrow which a man with a one-horse plow very neatly covered by turning his next furrow on top of them. Even before I started to school I must have had my different duties to perform. One of them, I know, was to haul slabs in a home-made wagon from a near-by mill to my own back door. My journeys back and forth were in some way tangled up with terror, for on one of those trips a hissing gander nipped me on my bare leg. Later on, armed with a broken shovel-handle, I

met and vanquished this gander. But the mill itself stands out more clearly in my mind. I loved the smell of the fresh saw-dust, loads of which I tugged home to bed down my mother's pigs. I loved to hear the great circular saw whine and scream through the pine logs as it turned them into lumber. I loved to watch the fiery monster that ate slabs and made steam to run the mill. And in spring and summer I loved to walk the boom-logs and jump from floating timber to timber. Once I missed my footing and went under and was pulled out by a mill-hand who shook me until my bones rattled and deposited me in the engine-room to dry.

Sometimes, when the river-drivers came in "to take the town apart," as they so modestly phrased it, the wondering youths of that time and place were confronted with strange sights. I remember birling matches on the river, contests where two drivers stood in their calked shoes on the same pine log and twirled and checked and reversed the floating timber until one of them was thrown into the water. I remember the *clank-clank-click* of the peavies as these same men worked at their log-piles. And I remember once being taken out to see a log-jam broken, and the joy, after much patient waiting, of beholding the key-logs finally released and the roaring, dancing, swirling tumult of timber that went down-stream in one soul-satisfying rush of power.

But another thing that appealed to me even more than the water-front and the saw mill and the blue-

misted river valley beyond the town was the railway, the magician's own road of shimmering steel so newly built into the heart of the pine forest. I loved the little engines, which seemed big enough to me then, and the jumbo cars and the tracked roadbed that led off into the unknown world. I suppose no child ever watches a train go down a pair of rails without being vaguely stirred by that departure, without puzzling over where it is going and tingling with the romance of its wanderings. I used to watch those trains and tell myself that some day I'd own a string of those iron horses to play with.

It was a narrow little world I lived in, there on the edge of the wilderness, but it seemed so wonderful to my young eyes that it stood the borderland of heaven. As I look back on it now, I see it all through a mist, as though it were not my own life, but another man's. And even the happiest parts of it, in some way, seem sad. I have to pull my mind away from it, the same as you pull a leashed dog's head away from a fish-basket. And instead of coming back to me as one coherent whole, that lost youth of mine comes back to me in a series of disconnected pictures, some vague and some vivid, but all overhung with a glamour as strange and sweet as a lad's first kiss of love.

It's a long way back. But I can shut my eyes and see the blue-white hills or the winter pinelands, as lonely as death, with the wolves howling out of the darkness of the forest and the sound of sleigh-bells on

the frosty air. And it's the bells I remember best. I can see the logs, the towering loads of logs, with the shouting men on top of their sleigh-loads, snow-splashed and rime-covered, the logs creaking and whining under their chains, with the frosted horses tugging and pulling and the bells ringing as they went, silvery bells, chiming through the white hush of the winter morning, through the blue dusk of the deepening twilight, bells jingling and jocund, bells distant and dreamy, bells on sled-tongues and harness-collars and neck-yokes, bells on tug-buckles and hame-points, whole strings of bells paralleling surcingles under steaming bellies, chiming musically with every lift of every sharp-shod hoof, bells that beat the loneliness back and made my wilderness a land of ceaseless music! I loved to hear them, to be near them. I ran away, once, riding on an empty bobsleigh with a dangling chain dancing and singing behind it and a double chime of bells caroling from the iron-gray team in front of it. I rode into the bush until the driver, with an oath, stopped and made me dismount, ordering me to get home or he'd flay the hide off me. And in my efforts to make home I got lost, utterly lost, and darkness came down on my world, and it was only God's own mercy I didn't die of cold and hunger that night. But when my legs could carry me no farther I spotted the lights of a lumber-camp and was taken in and given hot soup and sandwiches made of thick bread and cold pork and put to bed in a wall-bunk. There I lay awake listening

to a fiddler who played wonderful tunes while the lumber-jacks shouted and danced and quarreled and sang about the red-hot stove. I was taken home the noon of the next day. For the first time in my life that I can remember, my mother put her arms around me and held me close against her breast.

She was good to me, that mother of mine, but she was not a demonstrative woman. She had scant time, I suppose, for showing her feelings. And hard work makes a hard race. Small as I was, as I've already said, I had to help with the farm chores. I had to carry swill to the hogs and skimmed milk to the calves and gather eggs and keep the wood-box filled, and water and bed down the stock and shovel snow in winter and pull weeds in summer. It's queer what we remember, out of the welter of time. It seems only yesterday when I'd carry my wooden bucket of skimmed milk out to the calf-pen and the bunting and drooling noses of those calves would poke themselves through the pen-slats and suck at a loose button on my threadbare old reefer or get hold of a loose sleeve-end and do their best to drain a breakfast from dry cloth. If they were young, I'd help them to take up the skimmed milk by letting them suck on my bunched fingers as they drank, and the clinging moist mouths, I remember, would give me a small chill of nerve-ends up the arm. And I must have been an acquisitive little beggar, even in those early days, for I could find eggs where no one else found them, and once on the trail of a "stolen" nest out in the surrounding slash, I never

gave up until my hidden cackle-berries were duly gathered in.

But even my pleasures, in those early days, were in some way tangled up with production. Fishing, for example, has been the one joy of my life. And I was allowed to fish, as a boy, because the string I invariably brought home helped out the family larder. I was also an expert frog-snarer. Armed with pole and line and a three-pronged hook adorned with a bit of red flannel, I would pioneer along the woodland swales and swamp-edges and capture my harvest of meaty-legged bullfrogs. I can still see myself wading barefooted into amber pools warm with the spring sunshine, dropping my snare beside a sleepy green-back, and neatly hooking him as he leaped for my incendiary splash of red. In spring, too, I was allowed to help with the sap-buckets in one of the near-by sugar-camps. Why I was given money for this work I could never quite understand, since life, for a week or two, turned into one cloying dream of sweetness. I drank sweet sap by the quart; I licked birch-paddles dipped into sirup-boilers; I ate maple-wax, cooled in the snow of the dwindling bush-drifts, ate it by the pound. And I carried home precious cakes of the brown sugar, wrapped in birch-bark. But my crowning joy, as I remember it, was being allowed to sleep with the bushmen in their open-sided shanty, watching the midnight glow of the fires under the boiling-pans and feeling very grown-up in being a member of that rough group.

Later in the season, like other boys of that countryside, I became a berry-picker. I was sent foraging about the slash and clearings with a wooden bucket tied to my belt, picking wild raspberries until my fingers ached and my hands were reddened with the running juice. A full pail was always expected of me. Sometimes, when the berries were plentiful, I'd make rogans of birch-bark and fill them as well. But I'd always have time to eat my fill, to watch the squirrels and the whisky-jacks, and perhaps get a glimpse of a fox or a white-tail deer as it vanished through the dappled shadows. Once, I remember, I came face to face with a brown bear. We stood staring at each other for several moments. I know, now, that this bear was not as big as memory tries to paint him. But he seemed big enough, at that time, to petrify me with terror. I don't think I breathed until he turned and shuffled off through the brush. Then I took my pail and ran like a white-head. Always, from that day, I shunned that particular stretch of woodland. I even used to dream about that hairy monster standing and disputing my right of way and dining on my bones. Those nightmares passed away, however, when early in my teens I came into possession of Syd Steinhoff's old muzzle-loader. For when I possessed a firearm I possessed power. And fear is only the knowledge of weakness.

I have still another painful memory of my berry-picking days, but I can't be sure how much of it is real and how much of it is mere imagination. I seem to

remember a tall and ragged Indian who stopped me on my way home through the woods and took my pail of berries away from me. I resented that theft and tugged at the pail with all my strength. But the great figure pushed me aside with a lordly gesture and walked away with the fruits of my labor. I may, indeed, have dreamed that entire encounter. Yet I know that my youthful attitude toward all Indians was one of contempt touched with hate. They seemed a poor lot to me, already losers in the game of life. I can still recall one begging Pottawattomi buck, who had come to our house asking for tea, stopping in the yard before an iron kettle in which my mother was boiling down lye leached from wood-ashes, for her soft-soap. As far as I can figure it out, that redskin mistook the brown liquid in the pot for maple-sirup. At any rate, he quietly dipped out a ladleful, blew on it, and swallowed the scalding stuff. It must have blamed near burned out his tube linings. I felt that I was avenged, as I stood calmly watching his contortions, for the earlier theft of my pail of berries.

Yet my prejudice against the Indian may have been partly based on another episode which took place either before or after the soap-kettle encounter. The small cellar under our kitchen was reached by a trap-door in the floor-boards of the kitchen itself. I'd been sent down to get a dish of potatoes from the cellar store and had left the trap-door open behind me. It was winter-time, for there was snow on the ground, though the sun was shining brightly. When I was



down there three Pottawattomis walked into the house, striding in, as visiting Indians always do, one after the other and never bothering to knock before entering. At any rate, after the glare of the sunlit snow they were unable to see that unexpected opening in the kitchen-floor and the three swarthy figures came tumbling and grunting down beside a very terrified young boy who crouched back in the darkness wondering when the customary tomahawk would sink into his skull.

Another memory I have, not altogether without significance, was the building of a footpath about our home yard left muddy with the spring thaws. For this I tugged load after load of clean yellow saw-dust from the near-by mill. Then I struggled home with even bigger loads of pine slabs, which I staked down about two feet apart, filling the space between with the saw-dust. It was hard work for me, but I kept at it to the end. And I glowed with triumph when I had finished that, my first job of road-building. Thereafter we could walk dry-shod from the back door to the root-house, to the well-platform, even to the chicken-coop and on to the pig-pen and the stable. It was my first transportation system. And from time to time I re-ballasted it with fresh saw-dust from the mill and refilled an occasional wash-out and repaired an occasional break in my retaining walls.

But about this time a new world was opening up around me. There was no school in our immediate neighborhood, so for two hours every evening my

mother sat at the kitchen table with me teaching me the three R's. She let nothing interfere with those lessons, for she was determined, from the first, that I should have my chance in the world. She was very patient with me. Even when lessons were over she would talk to me until bedtime, talk to me as she might with a grown-up. This, I think, was one of the reasons why I became more serious-minded than most boys of my age. It cut short my youth, in a way, but, on the other hand, it gave me an earlier start at the serious things of life. By the time I was eight years old I could milk a cow, strip the udder to its last drop, and steady her with a fence-rail across her shin-bones if she threatened to kick. By the time I was eleven I could drive a one-horse cultivator and handle an ax and unhitch a team. I was not averse to these labors. They don't seem to have impressed me as drudgery. But there was little time for play in my life. Like other boys so placed, I had to make play of my work.

But my mother, apparently, couldn't have been very successful with her farm. A dry summer burned up our crops, and I can recall the solemn visits of a solemn old note-shaver in black, with much talk about mortgages and foreclosures and over-due interest. One night, on coming home from the mill, I found my mother in tears. She wasn't a woman who easily surrendered to grief. She tried her best, in fact, to keep her wet and reddened eyes turned away from me. But I knew that evil had overtaken our house.

About a week later we were put out of it. An auctioneer with a drooping mustache that made him look like a walrus appeared on the scene, our meager furniture was put out in the open air, and piece by piece our belongings were sold to the highest bidder. It made so moving a drama in my quiet life that sorrow at the loss of those friendly old objects seems to have been eclipsed by the excitement in the repeated duels for possession and the continuous quips of the walrusman mounted on our kitchen-table. But my heart sank when I realized that our live-stock was to be included in the sale. I crept to my mother, who was seated on an overturned washtub, and buried my face in her lap, that I might not see the animals I had loved led away. She strained me to her shoulder and I could feel her body heave with a quiet sob or two. Then she pulled herself together. "Be a man, Jack," she said, as she patted my back. "We'll win out yet."

We stayed at a neighbor's house for a week or two and then my mother moved on to Nagisaw, where she ran a sort of boarding-house for the lumber-jacks and road-men. I can remember how the spiked boots of the river-men ground the floor of her dining-room into a mass of splinters, how they wore thin the treads of the dark and narrow stairway that led to the sleeping-quarters above, how they ranged themselves night by night about the old round-bellied stove and smoked and spat into its ruby throat and told tales of log-drives, timber-wolves, ax-duels and hair-breadth escapes from forest fires, until I was shooed off to bed.

But our home in Nagisaw, luckily, was near a school, and no time was lost in starting me off on my new studies. I was a shy lad, in those days, having lived much of my life alone. And it was the cruel custom in frontier communities such as this, that all newcomers could be accepted only after battle. I was a quiet and self-contained youngster, but I was thick-muscled and sinewy and strong as a young ox. And before I was a day at the new school I saw that my fated rival was one Archie Hueffer, the son of a mill-boss and the undisputed autocrat of his class. He was taller and two years older than I was and enjoyed a considerable local reputation as a "hoof-slapper." This meant that when he fought he fought with his feet as well as with his fists. This discomfoting fact, however, did not altogether discourage me and I duly accepted his challenge for combat.

I was a new boy, and I had no supporters. I stood, indeed, an object of common ridicule, some of my classmates finding my clothes a source of merriment and some of them, having detected me in certain of my home duties, crowning me with the unsavory term of "pot-washer." So I felt very much alone in the world as I made my tremulous way down to the trysting-ground behind the pail-timber mill, where we could fight without interruption from our elders.

It was, I suppose, a good deal like other fights engaged in by that young savage known as Boy. It was a long fight and a bitter one. Blood flowed on either side. The time came, in fact, when I could view my

enemy through only one eye. A false wave of courage swept through me, however, when I saw that I had a chance of holding my own. But I failed to count on my bigger enemy's adeptness and finish as a kicker. When he found that he could not pound his way to victory with his fists he resorted to adroit and unexpected movements of the feet. A boot-toe against the ribs knocked the breath out of my body and another in the stomach left me uncertain of my bearings. Before I could recover from this, the agile leg that could flail like a ballet-dancer's brought a heel up flat against my face and sent me sprawling. And before I could roll over I was kicked again and again about the body, until the only thought that remained in my muddled head was to get beyond reach of those merciless feet, before I went to pieces like a barrel without hoops. I managed to get on my hands and knees. But that was the best I could do. And then I tried to crawl away. I could hear the shrill chorus of derision as I floundered off on all fours, triumphantly kicked from behind as I went. I crept away, my body aching with pain. But in my soul rankled the sharper pain of defeat. I sobbed aloud as I struggled to my feet and groped my way toward the mill-shed, my flight followed by the cruel jibes of the crowd who had witnessed the pot-washer's defeat.

I was still sobbing there when a pale-eyed giant in a plaid woolen shirt open at the throat flung down a cant-hook and came solemnly over to where I leaned against a slab-pile. He turned me around and put a

huge forefinger under my chin and lifted my face up to the light. Then he pulled a flask from his pocket and made me take a drink from it. The stuff I drank burned my throat. It was raw liquor.

"So they're all ag'in ye, air they?" he said, as he wiped my face with a rusty red handkerchief that smelled of sweat. He turned and looked back at the jeering group. Then he took a chew of tobacco and stood silent a moment.

"Air ye licked?" he asked in an encouraging man-to-man way.

I don't know whether it was that unlooked-for sympathy or the "red-eye" that had begun to sing in my veins. But I squared my battered jaw and shrilled out: "They can't lick me, not a dam' one o' them!"

The great hand thumped me on the shoulder.

"Now ye're talkin', lad. Ye're not licked till ye say so. And ye're goin' back to face that bootin' bully in fair fight."

We went back, much to the amazement of Archie Hueffer and his gang. My mill-yard giant was very businesslike about it all. He drew a circle in the trodden saw-dust and placed young Hueffer in the middle of it. Then on Archie's shoulder he placed a chip, with the solemn injunction that all comers were to be challenged to remove that pregnant bit of pine-bark from its resting-place.

My enemy's slightly swollen eye was on me as he issued that challenge. I could hear the derisive shouts of his supporters and the mill-man's warning that the

first fighter who used his feet would be thrown into the river. But my body was on fire as I stepped into the ring. My ears were singing as I confronted Archie Hueffer, as with one hand I knocked aside his precious chip and with the other smote him smartly and unexpectedly on the end of the nose.

Boys' fights, I've found, are very seldom knock-down affairs. They are more like the straddling combats of pullets, with few clean-cut blows and much showy ruffling of feathers. But toil had hardened and broadened my bony young fist. There was weight behind it. And I burned with a black rage. I fought like a she wildcat robbed of her young. I brought a red stream to young Hueffer's nose, and knocked two of his teeth out, and clutched his ankle as he went to kick at me in the groin. And as he struggled up from the saw-dust I drove a second fist into his relaxed jaw and for the second time sent him sprawling. But bully or not, he was of the breed who don't easily give up. He came back, for the third time, and for the third time we closed and countered and pounded each other's swollen's features. When he went down, of a heap, after a straight-arm drive that took the skin from my knuckles, I promptly and triumphantly sat upon his prostrate body and drunkenly demanded if he had had enough. And he somewhat thickly acknowledged that he had. Whereupon I took my hand from his throat and rose with dignity and addressed the assembled multitude of youth, shrilly challenging any member thereof to meet me in combat or there-

and keenest battle that he-men can wade into. There's only one thing bigger: and that's war itself. Our calling, once you've got an inkling of how the works go round, is the one enterprise where you'll always find a super-man on the job, the super-man making his jumps ten moves ahead of the game, always watching and countering some other super-man, fighting the blind forces of nature when he's not fighting the wolves of finance, fighting the tin-horn statesmen who follow the new game of playing football with their country's transportation systems, and fighting even his own help when they emulate the "hogger" on the front end and try to ride the old iron horse to death, by demanding more wages than there is revenue in the train.

It takes a big man to run a big road, in these days. But, when I come to think of it, these presidents and general managers seem to do their work with muzzles on. They consume their own smoke. They seem to get along without any grievance committee to justify them either to their own board of directors or to a listening world. But it might be better for all concerned, I've about concluded, if that world had a clearer idea of what the average railroad head has to face. I can remember one morning when my boy Newt and a college chum of his came down to the office to get passes for a moose-hunt up north of a new gravel pit of ours. They came for a favor, but they stayed long enough to have a laugh over my wall mottoes. Newt didn't seem to see much value in those framed phrases



of mine, "Serve to Survive" and "Steam Makes the Grade" and "Ability Always" and "Get On or Get Out." He didn't approve of them, any more than he approved of me. But they were my battle-standards. It hurt me to see him smile over the three words I kept above my desk: "Faith Is Force." For it proved that he didn't have faith in his own father. I suppose he regarded that father, in fact, as a curt-spoken rough-neck who wore baggy trousers and detachable cuffs and initialed operating-reports in his shirt-sleeves and failed to keep poetry magazines in his private car and still clung to the childish faith that some day he'd stumble on a smokable cigar for five cents. He considered me at least ten laps behind him in the race toward civilization. But that fall when my college-finished offspring was up stalking a bull-moose through a few miles of pineland, I was stalking a government concession that meant another ten million to my system, and stalking it just as craftily as my soft-handed son was stalking his forest friend with the fur on. He killed his moose and dined on the more delicate parts of it. He made a meal. But I made history. And when he was helping to make a polo score at the country club I was helping to make maps.

That, it seems to me, is the difference between the old generation and the new. We oldsters were pioneers, with a wilderness to redeem. We conquered it and linked it up with steel. And the story of our nation is pretty well the story of those steel links. It was our railroads that sewed up our ragged frontiers

and made us one. It was transportation, assured and cheap and quick, that made us possible as a united nation. And I'm the boss of one of those links, the head of a system that runs from sea-water to sea-water. That system was begun, I acknowledge, in the older era when railways were largely a law unto themselves, when the claim was apt to go to the quickest and the spoils to the strongest. But for everything I got I worked, and worked hard. It may have cut me off from some of the amusements that loom so big to the younger generation around me. But I'm not vomiting remorse. It never made me a howling success as a co-tillion leader, but it kept me down to old-fashioned, fist-on-the-table facts. It never allowed a swallow-tail coat to sit easy on my big shoulders, but it gave me the satisfaction of knowing I was in a big game. I couldn't mouth about "*L'art pour l'art*," as they put it down in the walk-up studios, but I could still dig joy out of my day's work. For through it all I felt I'd a hand in a new kind of epic, not the kind Newt's artist friends try to paint with their little camel-hair brushes, but the kind that's inscribed in steel and stone and cement and stretches from tidewater on the Atlantic to tidewater on the Pacific. What's more, it brought the wherewithal to let my girl Natalie hobnob with some of the emptier crowned heads of Europe and my boy Newt to amble up to Harvard in a twin-six sport car. But when their dad first went out in the world he hobnobbed with bohunks in a box-car; and when he first went to school through the Lower Peninsular

pinewoods he traveled with a hickory thong around his waist to keep his blue-jean jumpers up.

And that reminds me that it's about time I was getting back to the beginning. But that, I find, isn't going to be so easy as it sounds, for I'm still ahead of something, no matter where I start. And I ought to begin, I suppose, by telling about my ancestors. But I don't seem to have had any worth mentioning. My father, William Rusk, was a New England millwright who made a failure of things in the East and became a sailor on the Great Lakes. After a few years of sailing he possessed himself of a rickety old steam-barge and ferried cord-wood from the River Thames in Ontario, to the growing young town of Detroit. His boat was called *The Alexander*. It was wrecked, one October, in the eastern shallows of Lake St. Clair. My father swam ashore, or was washed ashore, but three of his crew and about everything he owned went down with his boat. He made a living, for a few years, by digging out the roots of tamarack-trees and hewing them into ship-knees. Then he met my mother. She was 'Tina Jenner, the daughter of August Jenner, a pioneer farmer down next to the Ohio border. Old Jenner was a German. He was dead set against the marriage of his daughter to a wandering ne'er-do-well like my father. So the two ran away together. They were married in the town of Chatham, and made their return to Michigan by way of Sarnia and Port Huron. They tried farming, in a small way, a few miles west of the Nagisaw River. I

was born on this farm. Of it, however, I have no memory, as my father moved north, to a larger and rougher farm, before I was three years old. There, about a year later, he was killed by a falling tree while clearing one of his fields.

I have a vague memory of the funeral, of the bright metal handles on the coffin, of the depth of the hole into which this coffin was lowered, of my mother crying as the frozen earth was shoveled in on top of the hollow-sounding boards. On the way home somebody gave me liverwurst and fried cakes. I ate more than I ought to, when the older people's thoughts were on other things, and my childish gluttony made me sick. I grew as sad, I imagine, as the others around me, and my distressed little stomach emptied itself and I was scolded for spoiling Henry Spiedel's new buffalo-robe.

That seems to be as far back as memory goes. I know that after my father's death my mother tried to run the farm herself. She could not have been very successful, for I remember crying with the cold because I had no mittens to keep my hands warm. A neighbor's wife, whose name I can't recall, took me into her kitchen and warmed me beside the stove while she cut the worn-out feet from a pair of her son's socks and sewed them up into mittens, thumbs and all. I was very proud of them. I remember too when I was sent to the village store for coal-oil, trudging through spring slush that was ankle-deep, and being interrogated by the shop-keeper, who lifted me up on his counter, where my protruding bare toes

were solemnly inspected by the assembled lumber-jacks. They each threw a silver half-dollar on the counter and much against my will the store-keeper took off my ragged old shoes and stockings and tossed them into his wood-box. My sorrow at this robbery soon vanished, however, when I found a brand-new pair of woolen stockings pulled over my wet toes and a pair of copper-faced shoes placed about my numbed feet. It was the bright copper toes, I remember, that most captured my fancy.

Another memory, in some way mixed up with these bright copper toes, has to do with a mouth-organ, which I found one Christmas morning at the bottom of my stocking, along with a striped red and white candy cane. I could not play that mouth-organ, but there was romance in the mere sound of it. I slept with it under my corn-husk pillow and carried it about with me until the last of its little brass keys was broken off. But even at that early date I wasn't allowed to be an idler. I can still remember helping my mother drop seed-potatoes along a furrow which a man with a one-horse plow very neatly covered by turning his next furrow on top of them. Even before I started to school I must have had my different duties to perform. One of them, I know, was to haul slabs in a home-made wagon from a near-by mill to my own back door. My journeys back and forth were in some way tangled up with terror, for on one of those trips a hissing gander nipped me on my bare leg. Later on, armed with a broken shovel-handle, I

met and vanquished this gander. But the mill itself stands out more clearly in my mind. I loved the smell of the fresh saw-dust, loads of which I tugged home to bed down my mother's pigs. I loved to hear the great circular saw whine and scream through the pine logs as it turned them into lumber. I loved to watch the fiery monster that ate slabs and made steam to run the mill. And in spring and summer I loved to walk the boom-logs and jump from floating timber to timber. Once I missed my footing and went under and was pulled out by a mill-hand who shook me until my bones rattled and deposited me in the engine-room to dry.

Sometimes, when the river-drivers came in "to take the town apart," as they so modestly phrased it, the wondering youths of that time and place were confronted with strange sights. I remember birling matches on the river, contests where two drivers stood in their calked shoes on the same pine log and twirled and checked and reversed the floating timber until one of them was thrown into the water. I remember the *clank-clank-click* of the peavies as these same men worked at their log-piles. And I remember once being taken out to see a log-jam broken, and the joy, after much patient waiting, of beholding the key-logs finally released and the roaring, dancing, swirling tumult of timber that went down-stream in one soul-satisfying rush of power.

But another thing that appealed to me even more than the water-front and the saw mill and the blue-

misted river valley beyond the town was the railway, the magician's own road of shimmering steel so newly built into the heart of the pine forest. I loved the little engines, which seemed big enough to me then, and the jumbo cars and the tracked roadbed that led off into the unknown world. I suppose no child ever watches a train go down a pair of rails without being vaguely stirred by that departure, without puzzling over where it is going and tingling with the romance of its wanderings. I used to watch those trains and tell myself that some day I'd own a string of those iron horses to play with.

It was a narrow little world I lived in, there on the edge of the wilderness, but it seemed so wonderful to my young eyes that it stood the borderland of heaven. As I look back on it now, I see it all through a mist, as though it were not my own life, but another man's. And even the happiest parts of it, in some way, seem sad. I have to pull my mind away from it, the same as you pull a leashed dog's head away from a fish-basket. And instead of coming back to me as one coherent whole, that lost youth of mine comes back to me in a series of disconnected pictures, some vague and some vivid, but all overhung with a glamour as strange and sweet as a lad's first kiss of love.

It's a long way back. But I can shut my eyes and see the blue-white hills or the winter pinelands, as lonely as death, with the wolves howling out of the darkness of the forest and the sound of sleigh-bells on

the frosty air. And it's the bells I remember best. I can see the logs, the towering loads of logs, with the shouting men on top of their sleigh-loads, snow-splashed and rime-covered, the logs creaking and whining under their chains, with the frosted horses tugging and pulling and the bells ringing as they went, silvery bells, chiming through the white hush of the winter morning, through the blue dusk of the deepening twilight, bells jingling and jocund, bells distant and dreamy, bells on sled-tongues and harness-collars and neck-yokes, bells on tug-buckles and hame-points, whole strings of bells paralleling surcingle under steaming bellies, chiming musically with every lift of every sharp-shod hoof, bells that beat the loneliness back and made my wilderness a land of ceaseless music! I loved to hear them, to be near them. I ran away, once, riding on an empty bob-sleigh with a dangling chain dancing and singing behind it and a double chime of bells caroling from the iron-gray team in front of it. I rode into the bush until the driver, with an oath, stopped and made me dismount, ordering me to get home or he'd flay the hide off me. And in my efforts to make home I got lost, utterly lost, and darkness came down on my world, and it was only God's own mercy I didn't die of cold and hunger that night. But when my legs could carry me no farther I spotted the lights of a lumber-camp and was taken in and given hot soup and sandwiches made of thick bread and cold pork and put to bed in a wall-bunk. There I lay awake listening



to a fiddler who played wonderful tunes while the lumber-jacks shouted and danced and quarreled and sang about the red-hot stove. I was taken home the noon of the next day. For the first time in my life that I can remember, my mother put her arms around me and held me close against her breast.

She was good to me, that mother of mine, but she was not a demonstrative woman. She had scant time, I suppose, for showing her feelings. And hard work makes a hard race. Small as I was, as I've already said, I had to help with the farm chores. I had to carry swill to the hogs and skimmed milk to the calves and gather eggs and keep the wood-box filled, and water and bed down the stock and shovel snow in winter and pull weeds in summer. It's queer what we remember, out of the welter of time. It seems only yesterday when I'd carry my wooden bucket of skimmed milk out to the calf-pen and the bunting and drooling noses of those calves would poke themselves through the pen-slats and suck at a loose button on my threadbare old reefer or get hold of a loose sleeve-end and do their best to drain a breakfast from dry cloth. If they were young, I'd help them to take up the skimmed milk by letting them suck on my bunched fingers as they drank, and the clinging moist mouths, I remember, would give me a small chill of nerve-ends up the arm. And I must have been an acquisitive little beggar, even in those early days, for I could find eggs where no one else found them, and once on the trail of a "stolen" nest out in the surrounding slash, I never

gave up until my hidden cackle-berries were duly gathered in.

But even my pleasures, in those early days, were in some way tangled up with production. Fishing, for example, has been the one joy of my life. And I was allowed to fish, as a boy, because the string I invariably brought home helped out the family larder. I was also an expert frog-snarer. Armed with pole and line and a three-pronged hook adorned with a bit of red flannel, I would pioneer along the woodland swales and swamp-edges and capture my harvest of meaty-legged bullfrogs. I can still see myself wading barefooted into amber pools warm with the spring sunshine, dropping my snare beside a sleepy green-back, and neatly hooking him as he leaped for my incendiary splash of red. In spring, too, I was allowed to help with the sap-buckets in one of the near-by sugar-camps. Why I was given money for this work I could never quite understand, since life, for a week or two, turned into one cloying dream of sweetness. I drank sweet sap by the quart; I licked birch-paddles dipped into sirup-boilers; I ate maple-wax, cooled in the snow of the dwindling bush-drifts, ate it by the pound. And I carried home precious cakes of the brown sugar, wrapped in birch-bark. But my crowning joy, as I remember it, was being allowed to sleep with the bushmen in their open-sided shanty, watching the midnight glow of the fires under the boiling-pans and feeling very grown-up in being a member of that rough group.

Later in the season, like other boys of that countryside, I became a berry-picker. I was sent foraging about the slash and clearings with a wooden bucket tied to my belt, picking wild raspberries until my fingers ached and my hands were reddened with the running juice. A full pail was always expected of me. Sometimes, when the berries were plentiful, I'd make rogons of birch-bark and fill them as well. But I'd always have time to eat my fill, to watch the squirrels and the whisky-jacks, and perhaps get a glimpse of a fox or a white-tail deer as it vanished through the dappled shadows. Once, I remember, I came face to face with a brown bear. We stood staring at each other for several moments. I know, now, that this bear was not as big as memory tries to paint him. But he seemed big enough, at that time, to petrify me with terror. I don't think I breathed until he turned and shuffled off through the brush. Then I took my pail and ran like a white-head. Always, from that day, I shunned that particular stretch of woodland. I even used to dream about that hairy monster standing and disputing my right of way and dining on my bones. Those nightmares passed away, however, when early in my teens I came into possession of Syd Steinhoff's old muzzle-loader. For when I possessed a firearm I possessed power. And fear is only the knowledge of weakness.

I have still another painful memory of my berry-picking days, but I can't be sure how much of it is real and how much of it is mere imagination. I seem to

remember a tall and ragged Indian who stopped me on my way home through the woods and took my pail of berries away from me. I resented that theft and tugged at the pail with all my strength. But the great figure pushed me aside with a lordly gesture and walked away with the fruits of my labor. I may, indeed, have dreamed that entire encounter. Yet I know that my youthful attitude toward all Indians was one of contempt touched with hate. They seemed a poor lot to me, already losers in the game of life. I can still recall one begging Pottawattomi buck, who had come to our house asking for tea, stopping in the yard before an iron kettle in which my mother was boiling down lye leached from wood-ashes, for her soft-soap. As far as I can figure it out, that redskin mistook the brown liquid in the pot for maple-sirup. At any rate, he quietly dipped out a ladleful, blew on it, and swallowed the scalding stuff. It must have blamed near burned out his tube linings. I felt that I was avenged, as I stood calmly watching his contortions, for the earlier theft of my pail of berries.

Yet my prejudice against the Indian may have been partly based on another episode which took place either before or after the soap-kettle encounter. The small cellar under our kitchen was reached by a trap-door in the floor-boards of the kitchen itself. I'd been sent down to get a dish of potatoes from the cellar store and had left the trap-door open behind me. It was winter-time, for there was snow on the ground, though the sun was shining brightly. When I was

down there three Pottawattomis walked into the house, striding in, as visiting Indians always do, one after the other and never bothering to knock before entering. At any rate, after the glare of the sunlit snow they were unable to see that unexpected opening in the kitchen-floor and the three swarthy figures came tumbling and grunting down beside a very terrified young boy who crouched back in the darkness wondering when the customary tomahawk would sink into his skull.

Another memory I have, not altogether without significance, was the building of a footpath about our home yard left muddy with the spring thaws. For this I tugged load after load of clean yellow saw-dust from the near-by mill. Then I struggled home with even bigger loads of pine slabs, which I staked down about two feet apart, filling the space between with the saw-dust. It was hard work for me, but I kept at it to the end. And I glowed with triumph when I had finished that, my first job of road-building. Thereafter we could walk dry-shod from the back door to the root-house, to the well-platform, even to the chicken-coop and on to the pig-pen and the stable. It was my first transportation system. And from time to time I re-ballasted it with fresh saw-dust from the mill and refilled an occasional wash-out and repaired an occasional break in my retaining walls.

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mother sat at the kitchen table with me teaching me the three R's. She let nothing interfere with those lessons, for she was determined, from the first, that I should have my chance in the world. She was very patient with me. Even when lessons were over she would talk to me until bedtime, talk to me as she might with a grown-up. This, I think, was one of the reasons why I became more serious-minded than most boys of my age. It cut short my youth, in a way, but, on the other hand, it gave me an earlier start at the serious things of life. By the time I was eight years old I could milk a cow, strip the udder to its last drop, and steady her with a fence-rail across her shin-bones if she threatened to kick. By the time I was eleven I could drive a one-horse cultivator and handle an ax and unhitch a team. I was not averse to these labors. They don't seem to have impressed me as drudgery. But there was little time for play in my life. Like other boys so placed, I had to make play of my work.

But my mother, apparently, couldn't have been very successful with her farm. A dry summer burned up our crops, and I can recall the solemn visits of a solemn old note-shaver in black, with much talk about mortgages and foreclosures and over-due interest. One night, on coming home from the mill, I found my mother in tears. She wasn't a woman who easily surrendered to grief. She tried her best, in fact, to keep her wet and reddened eyes turned away from me. But I knew that evil had overtaken our house.

About a week later we were put out of it. An auctioneer with a drooping mustache that made him look like a walrus appeared on the scene, our meager furniture was put out in the open air, and piece by piece our belongings were sold to the highest bidder. It made so moving a drama in my quiet life that sorrow at the loss of those friendly old objects seems to have been eclipsed by the excitement in the repeated duels for possession and the continuous quips of the walrus-man mounted on our kitchen-table. But my heart sank when I realized that our live-stock was to be included in the sale. I crept to my mother, who was seated on an overturned washtub, and buried my face in her lap, that I might not see the animals I had loved led away. She strained me to her shoulder and I could feel her body heave with a quiet sob or two. Then she pulled herself together. "Be a man, Jack," she said, as she patted my back. "We'll win out yet."

We stayed at a neighbor's house for a week or two and then my mother moved on to Nagisaw, where she ran a sort of boarding-house for the lumber-jacks and road-men. I can remember how the spiked boots of the river-men ground the floor of her dining-room into a mass of slivers, how they wore thin the treads of the dark and narrow stairway that led to the sleeping-quarters above, how they ranged themselves night by night about the old round-bellied stove and smoked and spat into its ruby throat and told tales of log-drives, timber-wolves, ax-duels and hair-breadth escapes from forest fires, until I was shooed off to bed.

But our home in Nagisaw, luckily, was near a school, and no time was lost in starting me off on my new studies. I was a shy lad, in those days, having lived much of my life alone. And it was the cruel custom in frontier communities such as this, that all newcomers could be accepted only after battle. I was a quiet and self-contained youngster, but I was thick-muscled and sinewy and strong as a young ox. And before I was a day at the new school I saw that my fated rival was one Archie Hueffer, the son of a mill-boss and the undisputed autocrat of his class. He was taller and two years older than I was and enjoyed a considerable local reputation as a "hoof-slapper." This meant that when he fought he fought with his feet as well as with his fists. This discomfoting fact, however, did not altogether discourage me and I duly accepted his challenge for combat.

I was a new boy, and I had no supporters. I stood, indeed, an object of common ridicule, some of my classmates finding my clothes a source of merriment and some of them, having detected me in certain of my home duties, crowning me with the unsavory term of "pot-washer." So I felt very much alone in the world as I made my tremulous way down to the trysting-ground behind the pail-timber mill, where we could fight without interruption from our elders.

It was, I suppose, a good deal like other fights engaged in by that young savage known as Boy. It was a long fight and a bitter one. Blood flowed on either side. The time came, in fact, when I could view my



enemy through only one eye. A false wave of courage swept through me, however, when I saw that I had a chance of holding my own. But I failed to count on my bigger enemy's adeptness and finish as a kicker. When he found that he could not pound his way to victory with his fists he resorted to adroit and unexpected movements of the feet. A boot-toe against the ribs knocked the breath out of my body and another in the stomach left me uncertain of my bearings. Before I could recover from this, the agile leg that could flail like a ballet-dancer's brought a heel up flat against my face and sent me sprawling. And before I could roll over I was kicked again and again about the body, until the only thought that remained in my muddled head was to get beyond reach of those merciless feet, before I went to pieces like a barrel without hoops. I managed to get on my hands and knees. But that was the best I could do. And then I tried to crawl away. I could hear the shrill chorus of derision as I floundered off on all fours, triumphantly kicked from behind as I went. I crept away, my body aching with pain. But in my soul rankled the sharper pain of defeat. I sobbed aloud as I struggled to my feet and groped my way toward the mill-shed, my flight followed by the cruel jibes of the crowd who had witnessed the pot-washer's defeat.

I was still sobbing there when a pale-eyed giant in a plaid woolen shirt open at the throat flung down a cant-hook and came solemnly over to where I leaned against a slab-pile. He turned me around and put a

huge forefinger under my chin and lifted my face up to the light. Then he pulled a flask from his pocket and made me take a drink from it. The stuff I drank burned my throat. It was raw liquor.

"So they're all ag'in ye, air they?" he said, as he wiped my face with a rusty red handkerchief that smelled of sweat. He turned and looked back at the jeering group. Then he took a chew of tobacco and stood silent a moment.

"Air ye licked?" he asked in an encouraging man-to-man way.

I don't know whether it was that unlooked-for sympathy or the "red-eye" that had begun to sing in my veins. But I squared my battered jaw and shrilled out: "They can't lick me, not a dam' one o' them!"

The great hand thumped me on the shoulder.

"Now ye're talkin', lad. Ye're not licked till ye say so. And ye're goin' back to face that bootin' bully in fair fight."

We went back, much to the amazement of Archie Hueffer and his gang. My mill-yard giant was very businesslike about it all. He drew a circle in the trodden saw-dust and placed young Hueffer in the middle of it. Then on Archie's shoulder he placed a chip, with the solemn injunction that all comers were to be challenged to remove that pregnant bit of pine-bark from its resting-place.

My enemy's slightly swollen eye was on me as he issued that challenge. I could hear the derisive shouts of his supporters and the mill-man's warning that the

first fighter who used his feet would be thrown into the river. But my body was on fire as I stepped into the ring. My ears were singing as I confronted Archie Hueffer, as with one hand I knocked aside his precious chip and with the other smote him smartly and unexpectedly on the end of the nose.

Boys' fights, I've found, are very seldom knock-down affairs. They are more like the straddling combats of pullets, with few clean-cut blows and much showy ruffling of feathers. But toil had hardened and broadened my bony young fist. There was weight behind it. And I burned with a black rage. I fought like a she wildcat robbed of her young. I brought a red stream to young Hueffer's nose, and knocked two of his teeth out, and clutched his ankle as he went to kick at me in the groin. And as he struggled up from the saw-dust I drove a second fist into his relaxed jaw and for the second time sent him sprawling. But bully or not, he was of the breed who don't easily give up. He came back, for the third time, and for the third time we closed and countered and pounded each other's swollen's features. When he went down, of a heap, after a straight-arm drive that took the skin from my knuckles, I promptly and triumphantly sat upon his prostrate body and drunkenly demanded if he had had enough. And he somewhat thickly acknowledged that he had. Whereupon I took my hand from his throat and rose with dignity and addressed the assembled multitude of youth, shrilly challenging any member thereof to meet me in combat or there-

after hold his peace. And as my challenge was not accepted I that day became the acknowledged leader of the aforementioned gang of young savages. For over two years, after divers encounters with would-be rivals, I managed to maintain that leadership. Archie Hueffer and I, it is true, were no longer open enemies. But it could not be said that we were altogether friends. . . .

Tassie has just stopped me, on her way through, to ask what all the excitement is about. I didn't know what the girl was driving at. But here I've been shouting at Wallie without knowing I was doing it. And when I come to think of it, I feel a bit tired. Yet it's strange how those old scenes can stir me up, after the lapse of over forty long years. It's strange, too, how vivid they can stay in the mind. Wallie says I've been making faces and shutting my fists for the last half-hour. Well, perhaps I have. For I can still feel Archie Hueffer's heavy shoes against my ribs. And I can feel again the joy that went through my tired body when my bony young fist flattened Archie's nose and that twin stream of blood went reddening down about his panting mouth and trickled from his chin. It's a long time ago, when I come to think of it. But, in a way, it only seems a week before yesterday. . . . Perhaps my Natalie was right, when she had the nerve to call me an old man. I guess she wasn't so far wrong. For I'm getting on a bit. And this stirring up of the past has made me feel as antiquated as a Lambert pine.

## CHAPTER II

THEY were not all violence, those boyhood days of mine, though, naturally, the violent days have been the remembered ones. I can recall other things, softened with a haze of beauty and strangely misted with the dust of time. It must have been bald and hard, that life on the fringe of the Michigan pine-woods. But as I look back at it through the years it seems oddly crowded and colored and opulent. For about this time a new world was opening up about me. Through the narrowed portico of school and study I was able to enter a garden, the garden of literature. I began to read books. I stepped tingling into an Eden of romance. As I look back on it, it seems as abrupt and miraculous as emerging from an unlighted coal-cellar into an apple-orchard afire with bloom. But there were trivial tales to go through, I suppose, before I stumbled on the great ones, the unforgettable ones. The first of these seems to have been *Robinson Crusoe*, and night by night that story of shipwreck and island solitude carried me away from my bald little room where I was supposed to be asleep on my bed of corn-husks. A little later came the thrill of meeting and knowing *Tom Sawyer*, then fresh from the press. That story told of a life much closer to me,

in those days. It was not, apparently, regarded as model reading for the young, since one-half of it, I remember, was read in a haymow and the other half of it was devoured among the raspberry-bushes along the sunny side of a railway "cut." I never dreamed, as I looked up from those magic pages to watch the afternoon "down" train rumble past, that the day was to come when the writer of that tale was to travel in my private car and stretch his legs under my dinner-table. For Mark Twain and I met, later in life. And a responsive gleam crept into his melancholy eyes, when, over our after-dinner cigars, I tried to tell him what *Tom Sawyer* had once meant to me.

There were other books almost as magical. For digging a hole ample enough to contain the mortal remains of a dead horse, already in an advanced state of decomposition, I was rewarded by a neighbor named Pilcher with the loan of two dog-eared volumes by Bret Harte, *The Luck of Roaring Camp* and *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*. I found the noble-hearted gamblers therein described much more appealing than were the Sunday-school book heroes who dripped with sugary goodness and enriched the patient listener with pious platitudes. Harte, in fact, had me almost persuaded to run away and follow in the steps of the 'forty-niners. I think it was the tranquillizing influence of *David Copperfield*, which came into my possession in exchange for a broken-bladed jackknife and a small but bona-fide cannon that could be loaded and fired with black powder, that prompted me to remain

at home and demand less glamour from my immediate associates.

But the great accession in the matter of reading seems to have been a coverless and tattered copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. I can no longer recall where or how I got it. But I remember that I was discovered poring over its opening pages and that it was promptly taken away from me, as no fit and proper volume for a young boy to be wasting his time over. Day after day and week after week I searched for that hidden book, ready even to defy my mother in order to recover those tattered pages and determine what further events were to come out of the *Château D'If*. I found my lost volume, eventually, tucked away behind a meal-box in my mother's pantry. I found a new hiding-place for it, underneath a loose board in my bedroom floor. And night after night, when my school-lessons were finished and my home-work done and I was supposed to be sound asleep, I would slip out of bed, re-light the little coal-oil lamp, resurrect my beloved volume, and go wafting off over the seas of romance. When I heard my mother's heavy step on the stairs, coming up from her long day of labor, I'd hurriedly hide away the book and put out my lamp. But one night, unfortunately, I read longer than I should have. I fell asleep, in fact, with the tell-tale lamp still burning and the forbidden novel still in my hand on the old patch-work quilt. At any other time, I think, my mother would have understood. But she was a harassed and toil-hardened woman, at

that period, and her one obsession was to see me succeed at my school studies. She knew nothing, I suppose, of a boy's secret hunger for high romance, of his craving for some glimpse of the light that never was on land or sea. At any rate, I was promptly awakened and confronted with my breach of trust and punished for the same by being forbidden to go fishing for perch along the overflow coves of our near-by river, at high-water time, when one's catch was limited only to the number of fish-worms in one's bait-tin. The next morning *The Count of Monte Cristo* was burned in the dining-room range, before my own stricken eyes. It was five long years before I could get my hands on a second copy and finish reading the story.

But the glamour, for some reason, had gone out of it. By that time I had grown into less of a dreamer and was more interested in the technical books that already impressed me as holding the key to power. For even in those days I had an itch for power. I remember being taken to Detroit, where with a bag of peanuts in my hands, I sat on the new City Hall steps and watched a military band march past. It was the first time I had ever heard a real band, a brass band. It sent shivers up and down my spine and pretty well went to my head. It spelled greatness to me. It stood for some proud and haughty pageantry of life which had always been denied me. And as I listened to those martial strains athrob with the beat of the big drum I rather giddily determined that some day I was going



to be a great man. It seems, in a way, like the foolish mood of a foolish young hulk of a backwoodsman munching peanuts on a dusty stone step. But I can't help feeling that that was one of the most formative periods of all my life. It brought Vision. And no life is great without vision.

On another occasion, for all my youth, I was one day, given an emergency job as flagman at a D. and B. crossing where a new culvert was being put in. That was a red-letter day for me, a grand and glorious day where I stood in the middle of the muddy road with a red flag in my hand. There I savored my first taste of authority. With one wave of that flag I stopped the muffled farmers on their loads of bagged grain; I imperiously checked the advance of the four-horse team hauling sills for the new post-office; I grimly turned back the visiting bishop beside the local sky-pilot in his lemon-crate top-buggy; and I unconcernedly waved aside Old Man Hueffer behind his prancing roans. It was my first draught of power over other men. The joy of it, I'm afraid, rather went to my head. When there was no actual traffic to check I stood ankle-deep in the mud waving back imaginary caravans and arresting non-existent captains of commerce. But I loved it. And my one lament was that my taste of power should be so fleeting.

My mother was always behind me, in this aspiration toward bigger things. She had a blind faith in what book-learning could do for a boy. She would never let me miss school. Even though the snow was waist-

high I was sent forth to my daily lessons. At night I was duly cross-examined and tutored and talked to. And most of my learning, I must confess, did not come to me through schools and schooling. I was through with schools, in fact, before I was fourteen years old. But I was not through with study.

When I was thirteen my mother's health began to fail. The winter before she had had an inflammation of the lungs from which she never entirely recovered. Her cough stayed with her, during the summer that followed, and she became frailer and frailer. I had to help her with the house-work. I became pretty expert, as I remember it, as a dish-washer—for those stacks of smeared crockery were high enough to bring efficiency to the most awkward hand. But I took a strange pride in seeing those dinner dishes cleaned and polished and arrayed in rows. It was, I suppose, my awakening love for organization, for order and system. And my pride in that work even eclipsed the fear of ridicule at the hands of my boy friends, boy friends who clung stubbornly to the belief that all such labor was unfitted to the lordly male.

When school opened again, in the fall, my mother got a big-limbed Finn girl to help her with the house-work. Her name was Drina. The men, at meal-time, joshed and jollied her until her milk-white skin would turn rose-color. She pretended to dislike their teasing. But, young as I was, I noticed that she never ran away from it. And in the end, I remember, she married one of the river-men who had bought a farm up on the

Tittabawassee. I also remember that I was called on to bolster up the family budget, that fall, by delivering four huge milk-cans, every morning, to the depot platform. I'm not sure whether they were for shipment down the line or for use in the construction-gang camps. But one morning as I drove up to the depot a strange thing happened. The agent, it seems, had been trying to revive a dying stove-fire by using the kerosene can on it. I had backed up to the platform and was ready to lift down my first can of milk when I heard the explosion and saw him come running out of the station-room with his clothes on fire. He flung himself down and tried to roll, I suppose to keep the flames away from his face. He rolled right across the wooden platform to the tail-board of my old spring-wagon. When I saw him there, smoking and burning, I pulled the top off one of my milk-cans and tilted the whole six gallons over him as he threshed at himself like a boy fighting bees.

It troubled me, to think of wasting all that milk. But it did the trick. And the two of us used a second can to put out the fire in the station-house, for there was no water handy.

Big Sam Callard, the head of the road, came up the line that afternoon and sent word over to the school that he wanted to see me. The other boys told me I was going to get hail-Columbia for throwing away twelve good gallons of Big Sam's milk. And I half believed them.

But Big Sam didn't give me hail-Columbia. He

shook hands with me, and seemed surprised at my youth when he looked me over, and announced that I was made of the stuff that he wanted behind him in his work. He said there was a job waiting for me on the road, any time I cared to take it.

I ran home, to carry this news to my mother. My joy was tempered, however, by the thought that she would never allow me to leave school. To be a railroad man had been the dream of my youth. And to have that prize thrust in my hand and then taken away again even gave a touch of bitterness to my thoughts as I went in over the worn old threshold. But my mother, this time, did not interfere with my movements. I found her in bed, stricken with a sudden hemorrhage. She took my hand and held it hungrily. Something told me she was going to die, even when the others about the house stoutly denied it. I stole back to her and stood at her side in an agony of helplessness. She was the only one close to me in all the world. Her face grew softer, in those last hours. I can remember that even her hand, the hand that used to be so hard and red with work, became pale and tender, like the hand of a great lady. She stroked my head, when I bent over in a fit of helpless sobbing. She pushed my tumbled hair back and studied my face. I have never forgotten her eyes, as she looked at me. In them I could see a great sorrow and a greater love for the boy she had to leave behind her. . . . Before midnight she was gone. . . .

That was the end of our home. After that, too,

there was no more school. The following Monday I went to board with the Widow Remick and began work on the railroad.

I began as call-boy in the engine-house. My job was to call the crews two hours before duty. We had two boys, for the night and day shifts, and my labors were light enough. But I couldn't regard myself as a railroad man. I was still more or less of an onlooker.

It wasn't until I went into the roundhouse, as a wiper, that I felt within the sacred circle. That great divide in my life became doubly marked when for the first time I donned long pants. I felt converted, overnight, into a man. My work in the roundhouse, it's true, was neither clean nor easy, but I loved the smell of hot oil and steam and wood-smoke and the companionship of the iron horses that coughed in and out under the blackened roof. I liked, too, the mixing with stalwart and tobacco-chewing men whose casual blasphemies seemed almost a carelessly flaunted badge of courage. And I learned there what I was to learn over again a good many times afterward. I learned that labor could be man's best friend, that a full day was the best medicine for an empty home, that heavy work is the best cure for a heavy heart. There was, I think, a tacit understanding among the men there that they were to make things as easy as they could for the new kid. They were kind to me, in their rough way. And I loved being in that cavernous-roofed and sooty roundhouse, among the tired engines being made ready for their next run. It seemed like being close to the

heart of a vaguely organized power I couldn't quite understand. It consoled me, in a way. But it could not altogether rid me of the desolation that still ached in my oil-stained young body. At night, in my lonely room at the Widow Remick's, I was even foolish enough to give way to tears. More than once, I guess, I blubbered myself to sleep, like a five-year-old youngster.

There was one thing, I remember, that rather helped to buck me up. When I got my first pay I made good on a dream of my childhood and bought for myself exactly the kind of a jackknife I'd always wanted. It was a huge and wonderful knife. I loved it as a mother loves a child. I carried that knife for ten long years and the time came when I had reason to suspect that my own wife was jealous of it, for she formed the habit of scoffing at its weight and hiding it away before I decked myself out in my Sunday best. She said it turned me into a walking blacksmith-shop. And she may have been right. For I remember that it had a saw-blade and a hook for removing stones from a horse's foot and a blunt-edged spoon for reaming out a pipe-bowl or removing wax from the ear. It also had a nail-file and a can-opener, a five-inch hunting-blade, a cork-screw, a tooth-pick, a bistoury for slitting pigs, and, last of all, a hollow shank with a glass-beaded peep-hole wherein one glimpsed a plump and pink-tinted lady in fleshings. At least one half of the appurtenances of that complicated implement, it is true, were of no immediate use to me. But what I liked

about it, I think, was its power, its promise of service in unforeseen emergency. And it was something entirely my own, bought with my own money.

But a knife is only a knife and mere metal could not fill the great want in my life. I realized that fact when a fireman named Whelen, a great rabbit-hunter and lover of dogs, came to me one day and told me nothing bucked a fellow up like a good hound pup. He led me over to a shed, that evening, where a hound of his was lying with a litter of eight pups. I can still recall the wave of joy that went through me when he told me to take my pick. It was supper-time, in that four-legged family, and there was one husky little beggar who seemed more active in rooting his brothers aside and claiming the mother-teat that others tried to preempt. He knew what he wanted, that pup, and he knew how to go after it. That was the pup I chose. And I christened him Rooter, on the spot.

Rooter and I became fast friends, and the nuzzling of his companionable little nose in my hand in time drove the desolation out of my soul. I fed him and trained him and kept him in a kennel made out of an old nail-keg. He was something to come home to. And of a Sunday we'd go off fishing or tramp the woods together and bring back enough black squirrel and rabbit to pay for his board and keep. And when I started in to study again he'd sit by night with his nose across my knee and gaze up at me with the hungry faith that can make a man wonder why his own two-legged breed so seldom hangs on to a friendship with-

out a string to it. It was Rooter who kept me from going sour. And it was Rooter who, two winters later, when I was skating on the river and went through the ice, brought red-whiskered old Sandy MacIntosh from the pumping-station and gave him a chance to push the end of a fence-rail under my chin before I let my half-frozen body slip back beneath the broken rubber-ice floating around me. He had a bark like a bell, that dog, and an eye like a girl's, and a heart that wouldn't quail before a truckload of tom-lynx.

But the important point, at this time, was that I had begun my life as a railroad man. I was a strong boy and I liked to show my strength. I was a wolf for work. So I soon became a machinist's helper. My secret hope was to climb up through the position of machinist and graduate from the roundhouse to the big erecting or repair shops and there some day be foreman, and from foreman to forge on to master mechanic or superintendent of rolling stock. But Old Sam Callard, who had been keeping an eye on me, saw fit to direct me otherwise. He put me in the "yard" for a few weeks and then transferred me to brakeman on one of his mixed trains. He told me he liked my idea of trying to learn engineering through correspondence courses—which the other men had rather laughed at—and advised me never to cease to observe and study and work for the road.

It was while braking on that mixed train that I first met Aggie Newton. She was the daughter of a farmer-owner up the line, and once a week she went to town



on the mixed for a music lesson. I wasn't altogether unaware of those trips. I was shy, though, and there must have been a considerable number of music lessons before I found courage to speak to the demure and quiet-eyed girl in the red-lined woolen cape. I was little more than a youngster then, but I decided, in my own mind, that Aggie Newton was the girl I was going to marry. That dingy old day-coach seemed brighter when Aggie was sitting in it. I can still remember the rose-pink that swept up into her face when she had left her mittens in the car-seat and I had them waiting for her on the next trip to town. We became quite friendly, after that, and had a good many talks together. Before, I hadn't thought much of my brakeman's job. But I was sorry when Old Sam Callard told me he was going to put me on to firing on one of his engines. And it didn't add to my happiness to find that Archie Hueffer had fallen into the habit of driving Aggie back to the depot in his father's canopy-top phaeton, when she started for home again.

I had, of course, to go through my first examination as fireman. They weren't as formal in those days as they are now, but I was more nervous about it all than I pretended. To advertise my offhandedness, in fact, I confronted the examiner with a partly consumed "bull's-eye" in my mouth. A bull's-eye, I might explain, is an old-fashioned confection, a ball of brightly colored candy, like an all-day sucker without its stick. And I can still remember the examiner's disdainful eye as he watched me remove the half-dissolved ball.

"You know your train-rules, kid, and you know your engine," he said to me. "And you strike me as husky enough to throw wood into the box. But you've got 'o cut out the sugar-tits before you can get to runnin' a D. and B. locomotive!"

So I bought me a razor and began to shave once a week, whether I needed it or not. A few days later I was put to work bucking a wood-burner in the gravel-pits. After that I fired for a "logger" on an upper valley side-line. It was hard work, but I liked it. And at night, wherever I could get a lamp and three feet of chair-room, I studied my text-books.

When it came time for promotion to locomotive engineer the superintendent stopped short and said: "Rusk, how old do you make yourself out to be?" For even then it was in the rules, of course, that no man under twenty-one years of age could be eligible for an engineer's position.

I found the nerve to force a grin as I asked him: "Do you mean officially or as a friend of the family?"

But he didn't relax a line. "I'm making up your examination papers," he solemnly retorted, "and I want your official age." He waited for me to say something. "Are you twenty-one?" he finally demanded.

My spirits sagged, at that, for I knew the rules well enough. "No, sir; I'm only eighteen," I had to tell him.

That seemed to make him mad. He stared down at my papers and then he fixed a cold eye on me. "How

old are you?" he repeated, his heavy jaw shut over his shiny celluloid collar.

"Eighteen," I said again.

He hit the table with his fist. "Damn you, you're not eighteen," he bellowed back at me. "You're twenty-one. Remember that, you dunderhead. From to-day on you're officially twenty-one!"

So when I was still three years under age I got charge of my engine. I became a "hogger." They could afford to do things in that fashion, in the old days, because conditions were unique. The pioneer is not prone to be strong on precedent. You're apt to stretch the rules a trifle when you're chronically short of men and short of cash. And Old Sam Callard was something more than a mere pioneer with that little eighty-eight-mile system of his up in the woods. He was a great man and a great spirit, a great constructive spirit, and I thank God that I started my work under the wing of a man of that breed. If I've done anything worth while in this world it's because I've always tried to snatch at a little of the bigness of Old Sam Callard. At that time he had thirty miles of road from Lint to Nagisaw. Another fifty-odd miles of his road ran northwesterly to Pineland. But it was only a little one-horse logging-line up in the neck of the woods, wondering where it was going to steal its next flat-car and how it was going to keep alive after it had eaten up the timber along its right-of-way.

But Old Sam was a far-seeing man. He had vision. And that put him wise to at least two things. He saw

that the timber could not last for ever. And he saw that under prevailing conditions he couldn't hope to stand up against the eastern trunk-line which ran across his big valley and with which he "interchanged." He could contribute traffic to the big fellows, but because of the limited chance of service he could render his own community, compared with the wider distribution of the trunk-lines, he knew that eventually he could be starved out behind his own fences. So he fought like a cornered rat and worked like a hungry badger. He had to battle for elbow room. In sheer self-protection, stage by stage and mile by mile, Old Sam was compelled to stretch out the trackage of the D. and B. How he did it is a long story, and a tangled story, a story of fighting ever-shifting rivals and holding in check the ever-hungry financial men of the East (to whom his little line was merely a single pawn on a crowded board) and holding up payments until traffic brought in another batch of the much-needed dollars. But he hung on to his road. And he did even more. He not only kept it alive, but he made the thing grow, grow like a rock-pine without enough rootage, apparently, to feed a maiden-hair fern. He expanded that backwoods string of rust until he'd forced a connection with three trunk-line systems that finally touched his district, three lordly roads that swept by his lean little right-of-way when it was stretched out like a rubber-band ready to break. That, of course, was at the eastern end. At the other end of his line he also kept crawling out, carrying the steel

westward as the successively depleted forest-growth forced him on into newer areas in the desperate search for traffic. He spread quietly, like a disease. It was more like buccaneering than building, some of it, now and then, being done under the cover of darkness, with the Legal Department to clean up the debris after the field had been won. There was blamed little brass band and driving of gold spikes in those days.

But by the time the old D. and B. army-worm had crawled westward, in search of more pine, and got within reach of Lake Michigan, his territory providentially found itself rich in salt wells. That gave Old Sam both a financial breathing-spell and a not inconsiderable accession of west-bound traffic. He saw the wisdom of getting across Lake Michigan and linking up with his natural self-distributing territory by means of vessels at first and car-ferries later on. He also had a weather-eye open for those newer fields of traffic in the West, when the home-state timber would be a thing of the past. He foresaw what was coming and planned and fought and built to meet it half-way. He could see that Ohio, on the east, would remain a heavy lumber-consuming state, and that conviction took him toward Toledo like a milk-snake toward a cream jar. But he also realized, once he could get a western connection, that Ohio bituminous coal could be carried to the other side of Lake Michigan, that a share of the Pennsylvania anthracite traffic might be picked up, and that even New England merchandise and Pittsburgh steel might be made to roll over our rails

on their way to Wisconsin and Minnesota and Dakota. And from these latter states, in turn, we had a chance for the grain and flour that had to go east.

Old Sam managed to get his hooks on a goodly share of it, until wider traffic could give him wider chances. Then, reaching out for the dairy and Chicago packing-house traffic, he fought his next fight for direct contact with the trunk lines at Buffalo.

I was too new at the game, in those days, to see just what he was stretching out for. But I can remember the bitterness with which he used to rail against what he called "the Chicago gang," until he got what he was after from them.

"*That* nabob in a tail-coat tells me that if I didn't sit tight he'd pick up my little tin road and throw it in his waste-basket! Damn him, I had that dude eatin' out of my hand before he could get around to a change of spats! And my little tin road'll be big enough to pry him out of American finance, before I'm through with him!" So Old Sam used to storm. Once I heard him say, with the corners of his big grim mouth pulled down: "The seaboard or bust!" And I knew it wasn't bluster. He wasn't the blustering kind. But it was some time before I realized just what he was after. He intended to drive the old D. and B. right down to the Atlantic. With his own head and hand, I suppose, he would have done it, if the Lord had let him live. But the Lord has the habit of sweeping the board clean, sometimes, before the game's half-finished. So Old Sam was taken, just when he began to see light at

the end of his tunneling. He had to leave his job. And a younger head and hand had to take it up.

It seems queer, looking back over it all, that the kid he'd taken on for emptying a milk-can over a station-agent should have been the man to step into Sam Callard's shoes. But Old Sam had been grooming me for something like that, long before I got wise to it. There were times when I felt like kicking over the traces, in the old days, when he shunted me from position to position and let me sop up all there was in one berth just to shift me on to another. But he saw I had the driving power, and he wanted me to know the business, outside and inside. And perhaps I added a trick or two that Old Sam had never shaken out of the bag.

There was nothing essentially miraculous in what Callard had done with the D. and B. The miracle was that he could carry it through under such heart-breaking conditions. The Wabash did very much the same thing, extending from Kansas City and St. Louis through Detroit and Toledo to Buffalo. For a time, when they controlled the Wheeling and Lake Erie, they even got into Pittsburgh and dreamed of swinging down through the Western Maryland to the seaboard. But the Wabash had the millions of the Goulds behind it. And the old D. and B. had to scramble for its money the same as a street cat scrambles about for its meals. Why, there were times when pay-day forgot where it had gone. There were times when if we couldn't beg an interswitched car we'd steal it. But we all felt that we were just one family. And if finances

were low, we were willing to wait. For example, when one of our early way-freights killed a farmer's cow and the owner of the animal was around in half an hour with a demand for payment, that train crew had a mighty sympathetic understanding of our superintendent's dilemma. Every man-jack of them had substantial reasons for knowing there was no money in the pay-car, and none in the head-office, and none in the bank. The superintendent sat down on a tie and thought the matter out. He remembered that law-suits were an expensive luxury. He remembered, too, that suicidal bovines had a mysterious way of moving up both in price and in the pedigree-book after their decease anywhere in the immediate neighborhood of a railroad's right-of-way. But there was one other thing he remembered. Carrying supplies up to the logging-camps had taught him that those husky ax-swingers were ardent consumers of fresh meat.

So he went back to where the farmer was still shaking a dolorous head over his dead thoroughbred. "See here, my man," that superintendent curtly remarked, "I can't hold up traffic to argue about a cow. You say your cow's worth forty dollars. Well, hold off on this claim-talk for twenty-four hours and you'll get your forty dollars. You'll get it from me in cash, on the down run. Is that clear? Meet us at the water tank to-morrow afternoon and your money'll be waiting for you."

The farmer went back to his plowing. Then our train-crew quietly swung the carcass up into a box-car.



There, behind closed doors, strange rites were indulged in and the offal flung overboard and the neatly quartered Holstein stowed away before sundown. But the grub-boss of the logging-camp got fresh beef at a reasonable figure next morning, less freight charges and butcher's profits. The salvaged hide was even disposed of for three dollars, and out of the total proceeds the owner of the departed animal was duly paid in full and there was the considerable sum of two dollars and twenty-eight cents remaining, to be officially credited to freight earnings.

We were so hard up, in those days, that we almost hated to see another mile added to our line, the same as a day-laborer with an empty pantry is not overly elated at the addition of another pair of twins to his family. But whatever we were, we were at least one family. And we all had to scratch for a living. Since we had only bonds on the property, and a capital stock for which no money had been paid in, and no working funds or cash in the bank worth mentioning, we had to forage for the wherewithal to keep us alive. We had only one connection, at the beginning, and that a far from friendly one, our big rival from the East despising us as a weak-kneed outfit and standing suspicious of us as a would-be trespasser on their territory. But we were friendly enough ourselves. We borrowed their links and pins and under cover of night quietly and companionably shoved the borrowed cars newly possessed of broken draw-bars on to their tracks. We frugally greased the palm of more than

one of the big-road switchmen to let us swipe a string of "open tops" now and then. But we kept the cars moving. Pay-day didn't come around for the boys until the fifteenth of the month after it was due, so the rabbit of earnings always scampered two weeks ahead of the hounds of pay-roll—and when it came to ties and fuel and supplies we simply had to sit back and wait, like a panhandler in a park, until a new bunch of traffic gave us a new chance to purchase.

I've heard Old Sam tell how in his first winter of operating he carried on with a staff of nineteen, a train-crew of five men, an agent, a clerk and a roustabout, a machinist and his helper, and two section-gangs, one of four laborers and one of three behind their foreman. But I've also heard one of those foremen say that when Old Sam was ready to see a tie taken out from under the ruts, it was lifted out in shovelfuls. In other words, it was used until it rotted away.

I've said we all felt like one family, in those earlier days, and that must be a pretty hard thing for a 1925 operative to understand. There's a different feeling along the line, in these enlightened times. But with us the organization wasn't so big that it swamped the individual. When you're running a railroad with a staff of fifty or sixty men, those men have a pretty good chance of knowing one another. And if the road is losing money, they're all going to be wise to it. What's more, they know that if their road's going under, they go with it. It's like a school class where

the teacher knows every face on the little short line of wooden benches. So the old D. and B. men had a personal interest in keeping that road alive, in nursing it through its *cholera infantum* age. When Old Sam traveled over his system he went in one of our second-hand passenger coaches, or, if it proved to be an all-freight, shared the caboose with the conductor. I've seen him climb down and with his own hands help unload goods from a side-door Pullman. And at other times I've seen a ticket-puncher tiptoe up to the big boss, rubbing his hands together and whispering: "This is a great day, Mr. Callard. The old girl's carrying a hundred and seventy-nine dollars on this one down-trip!" Conditions such as this may have given rise to the unjustly circulated story that our early trains used to be held at the station until the conductor had collected enough cash fares to buy coal for the locomotive.

But, if we were never that bad, there were other instances where the one-family idea came into active enough operation. Like Napoleon's army, we had to crawl on our stomachs. Our little two-by-four road could keep alive only if its home territory kept alive. So, naturally, it had to be largely a matter of give and take. We had a switchman named Slimson, who fell from grace when he was suspected of teaming home bridge timber and grain-door boards to build a cowshed. When, during the still small hours of the morning Slimson was discovered hooking his engine on to a car of coal left by our competitor too temptingly,

close to our tracks, we let our coal dock quietly absorb that coal as the anaconda absorbs the pullet. And the earlier offense, of course, was officially overlooked.

And, in the same way, when the home town, which housed what by a wild stretch of the imagination they used to call "Headquarters," woke up to the fact that it needed electric-light, it was Old Sam who engineered the proposition, just as he gave it a fire-bell by having a rail bent into a triangle and mounted in a frame.

He saw that the bush farmers wanted their land cleared, just as they wanted a little "living" money. But there was no immediate market for cordwood. He saw that the town merchants couldn't live if the farmers had empty pockets. He also saw that his baby road had to make traffic or go glimmering. So he jumped in and did the sagaciously commonplace thing of quietly organizing a plan to burn wood, wood which he would have a chance to haul. That is, he organized a plant to burn wood to produce steam to make electricity to light the town to obtain a center where trade and factory-produce could be made to interplay with the surrounding community. It was The-House-That-Jack-Built principle applied to pioneering conditions. So, township by township the "bush" was shouldered back. As the power-plant ate the timber, acre by acre, potatoes and grain and livestock took the place of the vanished tree-boles. That meant freight for markets even beyond the little home town.

But as the wheatlands widened there was one fly in

the ointment. Our gross trunk-line rival got the longer haul on the grain to the big city and on the manufactured flour and feed that came back to us from this city. Old Sam sensed that it would be wiser to keep those freight charges in the pockets of the farmers along his own D. and B. It meant, of course, more money for distribution throughout the community, served by our road. So he embarked on the next stupendously simple venture. At his one-horse terminal town he organized a flouring mill and ground his incoming grain and made his outbound flour right at home.

Then came the next step. There was more money in dressed lumber than in logs. In our timber territory the "lumberman" was the pioneer. After the lumbermen came the cedar men. And after the cedar men came the pail timber men, and the charcoal burners, and then the shingle bolt men, and then the factory-made product that can run all the way from wooden automobile wheels to dining-room furniture. So, with new and widening settlements, there was naturally more traffic in dressed lumber and finished building material than in the same stuff with the bark on or merely rough-sawed. Old Sam accordingly got busy. He crow-barred factories into his territory and coaxed finishing-mills along his line. He quoted them bargain rates and baited the hook with a promise of free switching. He solemnly guaranteed them a car supply and a train service as good as they could get along the rival trunk-line—though heaven knows

where, in times of stress, he used to steal his box-cars! Then came still another step. Borings in our big valley had disclosed two things. One of these, as I've already mentioned, was underlying salt water; the other was a seam or two of coal. The coal was not the best in the world and it was in limited quantity—but it was *Coal*, something better than slabs to feed to our hungry hauling-engines.

Old Sam investigated and experimented. He tried it out in his locomotives and found it a failure. But he didn't give up. He made changes in his engine-gratings and tried again. And he got the stuff to burn. So, instead of hauling in Ohio and Pennsylvania coal, the valley began to dig its own bituminous and keep its money at home. With the developments of the mill industry, too, there had developed a worry as to what was to be done with the waste material. Slab-wood was no longer burned on the road. And to leave mountains of edgings and sawdust to rot away did not look like good business to Old Sam—and this, remember, was considerably before the day of the efficiency expert. So the old man devised a plan of using this waste material for the making of steam. What he wanted the steam for was not disclosed, at least, not until the ground was cleared and the ropes laid for his new venture. And then it was seen that he proposed to use his steam for pumping and evaporating the brine which he'd always wanted to get into salt barrels and on its way to Chicago. He built up a new industry. And when he was busy look-

ing after the town-sites he didn't neglect the country. He let his great driving-power show itself by buying up wild land, on his own hook, often enough with trivial enough initial payments, and giving this a chance to be converted into stock-farms. He wanted to show his friends and neighbors the possibilities of that valley, and he did it by running a few farms of his own, and running them at a profit. But above all things he wanted to bring in more neighbors.

His fixed idea in railroading, as far as I could see, was this: If you've got a customer who's all your own, give him the last kick of service he calls for. If your customer can use a rival line, give him your *surplus* energy, but *only* your surplus. Feed the country that feeds your road. Watch your ties, but think three moves ahead of the game. Give men your best, and demand the same from them. Never waste a clinker of coal on a run, nor a tablespoon of gravel on a right-of-way. And never waste time on regrets!

I have a photograph of Old Sam in my room, taken in the early days before camera men learned to play tricks with their soft-focus and their light effects. It's a savage old face, with an unexpected amount of gentleness in it, and perhaps a touch of guile. But the thing that still impresses me is its solemnity. They took life less lightly in the old days. I still have the picture of Lincoln that my mother hung above my little wooden bed. It's a face as rugged and serious as Old Sam Callard's. I used to lie in bed, as a boy, and study that face as the morning sun crept across the

raw wooden boards and lit up the cavernous eyes that could be courageous with faith at the same time they were morose with knowledge. Newt, I remember, used to laugh at the old portrait groups I kept hung up on my office wall. He used to call them pompous old birds and make fun of their whiskers. But when I study those old groups I see something in them I can't find in the younger faces around me to-day. There's a lean and questioning wistfulness, a shadow of some nobler desire, on the older faces. They don't seem to fit in with the flabbier, more finicky, more facetious, more skeptical faces of to-day. They were sadder. And they were stronger. And they were heavier, too, I suppose, for with all their grimness and their pioneer solemnity they seem to have missed some sort of saving lightness that takes this younger generation over the rough places where we hacked our way through with a hand-ax. . . .

But Tassie has just come in and told me that I've done enough for one day. And from the look on Wallie's face, as he winds up for the afternoon, I guess the lad's not going to die of a broken heart because Tassie has to motor him over to Los Angeles in the canoe-roadster before my vice-president starts east on the Sante Fe. They belong to the younger generation. They'll take the drive-curve on two wheels, laughing as they go. And I'll sit here looking after them, the old engine fearing a crumpled crown-sheet, thinking of the past.



### CHAPTER III

**A**S I'VE already said, I took up the D. and B. work where Old Sam Callard left it. But it was no easy mill I went through before stepping into his shoes. Old Sam himself saw to that. Thanks to him, I had the advantage of being both an outdoor and an inside man.

'As an outdoor man I made mistakes enough, though they were mostly the mistakes of careless youth. But one of them was serious enough to put a crimp in my career. 'At least, it seemed like that, at the time. I was on my engine, running a snow-plow down from Big Bear Creek, and Andy Gordon was lookout. As we swung down on the Stratton Mill station 'Andy failed to give me any "slow" signal and I continued to give her a full head as we bucked the big drifts. 'And I guess I was getting too much fun out of throwing up my smother of white to worry about just where I was. So we went through the yard there like a cyclone through a flour-mill. But the big boss himself happened to have come down that day to look over his Stratton plant. He also happened to be standing on the open station platform as Andy and I went by. He was there, along with a dozen or so other waiting passengers, and I knew exactly what was going to happen

to that bunch of blue-nosed idlers when we hit the big drift in the lee of the wooden station. We sailed by, hell-bent for perdition, and flung five feet solid of the beautiful over the whole breathless bunch of 'em. We buried 'em and didn't even stop to dig 'em up.

But you can't bury your general manager in a snow-bank without paying for it. Bright and early the next morning I was up on the carpet for it. And I found out how quick a railroad man's head can be cut off. The red-headed superintendent had me fired before I knew where I was. He sacked me, on the spot. And I felt that the bottom had dropped out of my world.

But about this time Old Sam himself stepped into the situation. He said that he never did like being smothered, though that wasn't the important thing. The important thing was that a small road like the D. and B. couldn't afford to have youngsters skyhooting round the landscape with its high-priced equipment. So, for the good of the service, and seeing I was under legal age for such things, I'd have to give up my engine and my dismissal would have to stand.

But I didn't leave the D. and B. For Old Sam, so to speak, simply knocked me down for the sake of picking me up again. He shook a little of the arrogance out of me, just to show me what discipline meant and to remind me that official dignitaries are not to be trifled with. And having shaken me down a peg or two, he took me into his own office, as office-man. And there, with a chastened spirit, I woke

up to the fact that I had to work doubly hard, to make up for my setback.

I worked, all right. 'And Old Sam wasn't the type of man to let any such laudable ambition wilt in the bud. The telegraph instruments, with their busy chatter of passing messages, always kind of interested me. So I used to go back nights to learn to pound the brass. I already had an inkling of Morse, from my evenings with old Wilkinson down the line, where I used to sit and try to read the tape of the register, for the old agent there still worked with the paper machine, the telegraph having horned into his life too late to let his failing ears read out dot and dash language when it came any faster than a turtle-crawl. So I made good progress, for a rough-neck off the iron. At one time there wasn't a despatcher or wire chief on the line could send so fast my ear couldn't follow it and my fingers couldn't get it down. And I guess I can still send about as fast as Mr. Walter Enman, for instance, or any of those city-bred quad men who burn up the press wires.

However, Old Sam was so set up over walking in and seeing me working the wire one day that he switched me into the despatcher's office as an operator for a while, telling me to watch and read everything I could or he'd cut me off the pay-roll. Then, when I'd hacked down to bed-rock at that work, when I was just beginning to feel that I was properly nested in my new berth, he tore me up by the roots and tossed me over into the car accountant's office. I

didn't shed any tears of joy over that transfer—but Old Sam knew what he was doing. And I began to get a slant on a new side of the business. I began to see that it was the transportation end of the game that was the big end. And I wanted to understand how to manipulate the supply of rolling-stock. I was green enough, in those days, to think I could finally get railroading down to an exact science. But I had to learn that no man has ever yet reduced railroading to a scientific basis, that a big man comes and tries for something new and something better, but when he goes out his accomplishment pretty well goes with him. I even worked out a graphic car-record system, a good deal like a German war-map, only I had numbered pegs to represent my cars and different colors to represent the different types of rolling-stock. The big boss himself sat up half a night to give it a try-out. And just about the time I was once more comfortably nested in my new berth and we were having our first real labor trouble, Old Sam kept the barnacles from attaching themselves to my brain by shooting me out and giving me a busy, one-man station up the line.

It seemed like demotion, at the time, but I began to see it was providing me with a new aspect of things, a new slant on where the sinews of war came from. And it brought me into new contacts with other busy men. It may sound queer, but I even got to like that station-agent life. I liked being lord of my little domain. I liked the checking and way-billing and handling

the old Saratogas and sample-trunks and helping the train-crews in the switchings and working the key and billing and selling tickets, not to mention keeping the old pot-bellied stove going in the waiting-room and setting the oil lamps and shoveling the drifts off the platform. For we had no schedule, in those days, to keep us from over-straining our manly muscles at what the modern union offspring seem to regard as mean and undignified labor. I liked my warm office with the cherry-glow of the little coal-stove in the center and the old armchairs held together with number nine wire and the row of potted geraniums along the window-sill and the quietness of the place after the down-train had gone through and the key cluttered in the warm air while the wind whistled outside. And most of all, I liked to remember that 'Aggie Newton's home was just over the hill, that I'd be seeing her two or three times a week, and that she could be as shyly friendly as a rough-neck like me could ask for—when Archie Hueffer wasn't hanging around. I didn't want to leave that berth. I had a hankering to hang out there until the heavenly cows came home. It seemed peaceful and complete, with the old chromo-topped calendars and the shiny old chair-cushion and the singing of my hot-water kettle on the stove. It seemed the sort of thing you could stand year in and year out, until the chair fell away from the number nine wire and your name crawled slow as winter molasses up the pension-list where it could go so far and no farther. I liked it so much

that when Old Sam intimated that he wanted me back into the office as chief clerk I'd just about decided to tell him I preferred my present position.

Something happened, however, to keep that fatal message from going in to the big boss. But when I recall how close I came to taking the wrong switch there I can't help feeling what a thin point it is that turns the man who might have been a millionaire into a bum, and, on the other hand, puts the potential bum into the millionaire class. I won't say it's accident, for I still like to feel, as I've always felt, that Character is Fate. But when I remember how close I came to turning into a rut-lover, a time-server, a happy-hearted shuffler, I can't help puzzling over why and how it is one man will succeed at this work and another will fail. I can't help recalling Cal Latimer, who joined the old D. and B. about the same time I did. He had far more schooling than I could lay claim to and had even been sent for two years to a technical college. He came of good stock and gave every promise of being a climber. We used to consider him a smart telegrapher. He looked so good, in fact, that the C. and L. took him away from us and when they installed the new interlocker at the yard entrance, they picked him to go up into the tower.

And Cal Latimer is in that tower to-day. They gave him a comfortable berth and he just nested down in it. He stayed put. He lost contacts; he lost initiative; he lost ambition. He gave 'em what they asked, and that was all. He couldn't make the extra pound

of steam to send him swinging up the grade of opposition. He smoked his pipe and grew petunias and played pinochle and read detective stories and acknowledged that all he wanted was peace and quiet. But the bigger life doesn't seem to be made along those lines. It's a queer thing, but as I've come to know it, it's a battle that bungs you up more when you try to slip out of it than when you wade right into it. For it's even worse being rusted out than being worked out. In the latter case, you've at least left something behind you.

There's an occasional example, of course, where the climber doesn't altogether understand the standpatter, where he doesn't make full allowance for the bad hand old father Destiny can deal to a fellow now and then. There's the case of Peter Cronin, for instance. Not so long ago, on one of my inspection trips with my new board of directors, I stepped into a despatcher's office at one of my former headquarters when I'd been superintendent. Peter Cronin was still there, the same trick despatcher he'd been twenty years ago, but not quite so fast a worker. So I shook hands with Peter and asked after his family. He told me, with a hardness of the face that was new to me, that he'd lost his wife three weeks before. I naturally replied I was sorry to hear that, and, without giving the matter much thought, inquired how long she'd been sick.

"Just twenty-one years," said Peter, with his quiet eye fixed on mine.

"Why, this is news to me, Peter," I told him.

"I thought it would be," he retorted, with what sounded like a touch of bitterness. So that made me ask why.

"Well, Mr. President, I'll tell you why," said my old train despatcher with his faded face studying mine. "This headquarters is the highest and driest point of any of the divisions. It's good air for lungers. Seventeen years ago the specialists told me this was the only air my wife could live in, for any length of time. So if I wanted to keep her I saw that I had to keep this job. When you were over this district as general superintendent you gave me a chance of promotion as chief despatcher to another division. But I had my wife to think of and I had to decline that promotion. You believed in efficiency, and you didn't cotton to anything that looked like opposition. You told me, when you saw me next, that I'd warm this chair for a good long time before you'd put another crow-bar under me. I'm not criticizing, remember, I'm just reminding you. For that's the spirit that's put you where you are. But you didn't understand. I've seen others climb past me on the official list. But for seventeen long years I've had my wife with me, and, as I reckon it, it's worth the price!"

I sat down in Peter's chair to think this over. Then I swung around and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Peter," I told him, "you've got just seventeen years to make up for. And you're a better man than I thought you were. What's the job you want to-day, out of this system?"



But Peter only laughed a little and then shook his head.

"It's too late, John," he said as he walked over to his key-table and stared out the window where he had a faded snapshot of a thin-cheeked woman feeding a pair of pigeons propped against the pane. "But I just wanted you to understand." And what kind of broke me up, even though I didn't show it, was knowing he was right, dead right. He wasn't the type to be an "organization" man. He didn't belong to anything, and he wouldn't want to. So he wasn't the kind to stir up trouble and demand promotion from the company. He stood as lonely as a light-house. And he must have got something out of it all that I couldn't understand. He must have had some pride in his own private code, even though I couldn't put a finger on it. But had I the right to say Peter wasn't progressive? I could recall the earlier days when we'd had many an argument on the question as to whether or not the despatchers should be allowed to belong to the O. R. T. And before I'd left his office Peter was even smiling his one-sided smile and asking me if I remembered those old fights about including the despatchers in the schedule.

"Times seem to be changing," he remarked as he lifted a "23" off his hook. "For here's what the boys put over the wire last month when the news came through that the old board had gone." He handed me the message. And it read something like this:

"To all telegraphers. . . . Board of Directors re-

signed this date. Each organization of employees will accordingly select its own representative for the new Board of Directors. Applications will be received up to midnight two weeks hence from those telegraphers desirous of filling position of Director, ability and seniority to govern. The new Board of Directors will elect the President and Operating Vice-President, ability only to govern.

“Signed: Local Chairman.”

I joined in Peter's laugh as I handed his take-sheet back to him. “I guess that ‘ability only to govern’ is meant for a little dig at me, Peter,” I suggested.

“Yes, it's meant for you, John,” he had the honesty to acknowledge. “But even at that I've a sneaking idea you'd stand a fair show for the job!”

Well, maybe I would have. But after I got back to my board of directors and turned to thinking over old Peter Cronin and his case, I didn't feel so all-fired full of ability as I might have. For old Peter, I remembered, had handled the busiest trick on a mighty busy single track division and had never once made a “lap” order. Yet in the same twenty years, when I came to think of it, I'd made enough mistakes, big and little, to sink a ship.

But it's not my mistakes I want to talk about, even though I've had my share of them. For no man ever travels in a dead straight line and no man knows what's ahead of him. That came home to me the first winter I was a superintendent. A blizzard hit us and buried track and fences on our Western Division and even Big Callahan, who was on the “head end,” couldn't buck

that snow. By midnight we were stalled in the open country, without a signal or a home light in sight, and no way of getting word back to headquarters. I kept the crew busy with the snow-shovels, but it was worse than trying to bail out the Atlantic with hay-forks. So I got impatient, seeing I had a meeting of considerable importance waiting for me. And I always hated marking time. So I called out the conductor and said we'd leg it to the next town, six miles up the road. We started off through the blizzard. For two solid hours we felt our way along the sleety darkness and plowed through the drifting snow. Then, when we were about ready to drop we were cheered up by a glimpse of lights ahead. That gave us some fresh ginger. So we fought our way up to those lights, rather pluming ourselves on having pulled through to send back relief for our stalled train. But I stopped short, hip-deep in a snow-drift, when I got up to the lights. For they were nothing more nor less than the tail-lamps on the rear end of my business car.

We'd spent two hours and a half in floundering around in a circle. We hadn't gone in a straight line. And, when you get down to hard-pan, that's what most of us do through life.

But there are times, of course, when we simply aren't dealt the right cards, when our fate doesn't lie in our own hands. And I had a sample of this before the big boss finally got me into his office as chief clerk.

Considering the pioneer conditions under which we

worked there was very little violence along the line of the D. and B. in the earlier days. But we seemed to roughen up with the advance of time. We began to get a different type of track-worker and bohunk. Instead of ex-sailors off the lakes and ex-hoboes out of the gold-fields and honest American workers we got mostly eastern and southern Europeans. These were all well enough so long as six days a week of steady work used up their extra steam. But they lacked ballast and balance. When they were fired for breaking into box-cars or given the g. b. for soldiering on their job they were apt to revert to type and rough-house things up. I was alone in my station one blustery March afternoon, cleaning up prior to my promised move back to headquarters, when a dark and thick-set stranger came to my ticket-window and asked for a single-trip ticket down to Nagisaw Crossing. Instead of handing me in the bill to pay for that ticket, when I looked up, I saw my swarthy friend confronting me with a Colt Forty-Two in his hand and an ugly frown on his face. He commanded me to hand over the till and hand it over quick. He had the drop on me and I knew he could put a bullet through my head at one pull of his finger. But I tried to keep my wits about me. I countered for time by asking him if he wanted the whole drawer handed out or if I was to empty it and merely hand over the contents. He said he wanted the drawer. So I hunched up closer, pretending I was having trouble in getting the drawer free of its slide. For one second, I noticed, his eyes wavered downward

as I jerked on the drawer-front. And in that second I made a grab for his gun and got hold of it. The thing went off, over my head, but I was fighting mad by this time, and before he could get a fresh grip on the stock I had my left hand up and clamped about his wrist. He was no weakling, for before we got through with that struggle he'd pulled me bodily out through the ticket-window. Then we had it rough and tumble, all over that little waiting-room floor. We were up and down like a couple of Greek wrestlers, fighting and tugging and straining for that gun. It wasn't until I got my teeth in his forearm that he weakened and let go. Then with a quick bunt of his thick shoulder he sent me staggering against the wall-bench, making for the door and stooping low as he ran.

We had upset the stove as we fought, and the wooden floor was covered with live coals. But I was thinking more about my man than I was about my station, and I sailed out through the door and down the track after him. He went like a rabbit. But I could reel off a fair clip myself in those days, and I was soon close enough behind him to give him a bullet over his shoulder. He kept on. But at the second bullet he stopped dead and threw up his hands. I recaptured him with his own gun. And I made him keep his hands up as I marched him back toward the burning station.

By the time I got him back to the end of the platform the up-train drew in and the train-crew came to my help. The passengers stood back and cheered while I

kept him covered until the crew could tie him up with a coil of telegraph-wire. I was quite a hero. And it didn't dampen my ardor any to notice that Aggie Newton was one of the passengers, standing rather white-faced back on the edge of the crowd with her hair blowing loose and her clasped hands held tight in against her breast.

I felt quite a hero, but there was one thing we were overlooking. While we were pulling off that grandstand play our station-house was burning up. Not only was good D. and B. property going up in flames, but the same drawer of cash that I'd been fighting for was at the same time being reduced to ashes. And we never had money to burn on that line. So when Old Sam came up to investigate I didn't find myself such a hero. He said that brains were the first asset of an inside worker, and since I'd only shown I had brawn I'd better get back with the rough-necks where I belonged. He dressed me down to a finish, proclaiming he'd banked on the wrong man and that I was only fit for outdoor work. So he put me on a steam-shovel. He sent me up to the gravel pits and gave me five or six months of the meanest odd jobs he could think up for me. And I guess even Aggie Newton kind of lost faith in me as a comer in the railroad world.

At any rate Aggie and I had a little misunderstanding just before I went up the line to close down a gravel pit for the winter and get the gangs out. And as far as I've ever been able to size up the situation Archie Hueffer wasn't letting the grass grow under

his feet when I was out among the bohunks working like a beaver and wondering if it wouldn't pay me best to jump the D. and B. and strike for the city, where I'd been told there was a chance of getting a job in the paint-room of a new carriage-factory.

But I stuck, for I had a kind of blind feeling that I was born to be a railroad man. And I had a suspicion that Old Sam was putting me through my paces for the good of the service. Something happened, however, about this time that blew my idea of service sky-high, at a single breath. When I was in at the gravel pit Dave Crummer, a brass-pounder I knew pretty well, sent a message over the wire to our nearest agent. "Tell Jack Rusk that Swede Hueffer and Aggie Newton are planning to hit Sawyer Center to-morrow morning to get married."

That's the despatch they brought me into the bush. And it was considerably like throwing a live coal into a powder-keg. For I'd had a word or two with Aggie on my own hook along those lines and enough had been said to make me feel that I'd a fighting chance with the only woman who could give me a trip of the pulse when I looked down into her eyes. And I didn't intend to lose out in that fight with a stiff like Swede Hueffer.

But the only way I could get down to the main line was by a log-train, thirty "jumbos" piled high with timber and many of them "barefoot." A jumbo, I might stop to explain, was a logging-car without deck or flooring and with hand-brakes. Its cargo of logs

rested on the bare bolsters. A car with its brake out of order was commonly called "barefoot," so that even in these days of air-brakes when trainmen find a sticky valve (which means either a dirty one or one that fails to respond to a change in train-line pressure so that the brake-shoe keeps on pressing the wheel) they cut out the air and, in rendering the line-pressure inoperative on a given car, make it "barefoot." Well, this train of hand-brake jumbos was coupled car to car only by eight-foot wooden poles, this to allow for the overhang of the extra-length logs. For a trainman to get from car to car, even in dry weather, was a good deal like walking Niagara Falls on a tight-rope.

The boys didn't want to take their train down until daylight, for a sleet-storm had blown up and covered every log and car with a shimmering coat of glare-ice. They looked like Brazil nuts that had been dipped in hot sirup. A train like that, naturally, would get out of control, since no one could pass from car to car to set the brakes. But when I put it up to them, with a shake in my voice that I was a little ashamed of, and showed them how they could help me board the fast freight at the junction on the main line, they weakened and agreed to take a chance. And it was a chance. We realized that when we got to Nippon Hill. Every rail and every log and every connector and brake-mast was a glare of ice. And when we came to the long hill we just ran wild. We went down the long two-percent. fall-away with its six degree curves at sixty miles an hour. We went down like thirty drunken elephants



dipped in glass, spilling logs at every curve we hit. We went down as out of control as a shot arrow, for a cat couldn't have crawled over those ice-coated timbers to get to the brake-masts. And we went, praying in a cold sweat we'd see no preceding train's tail-lights ahead, flashing red at us. We went, trying to keep our finger-nails hooked into the universal ice-rind and asking God to keep our logs still falling clear of the wheels.

But we got her stopped before we hit the big-stream steel. And there the High-Ball freight was taking water. I don't know how much of my story the boys on that freight understood. But they didn't ask for further details as they hooked on to our logs and took me up into the cab with them. We were timed to pull in to what was then my home-town station at seven o'clock in the morning, but the storm had delayed us and No. 4, the express close behind us, was due at seven-thirty. We had no rights ahead of her, but if we didn't "make in" before No. 4 we were billed to get stuck for No. 3, the west-bound. And that could mean a hold-up of anywhere from one to two hours, perhaps more. I wasn't sure of the exact hour Swede Hueffer was starting on his little overland excursion. But I would have walked through hell-fire to stop it. I never did find it easy to swallow the pill of defeat—and I'd had more than my dose that particular year. And when things looked blackest, on the way down, a warm rain started to fall and that cleaned the rails for us. We found out from the operator that No. 4 was

running twenty minutes late, and would be going in for No. 3. The despatcher was hell-set on keeping No. 4 on time, and swore she'd make that all up between the last report and the home station. So he refused flat to give us any time on her or on No. 3. I could read Morse easy enough and I knew, of course, exactly what that operator was saying. So I didn't feel any too good as I climbed back in the cab. I gripped a hand-rail and silently cursed the tribe of Hueffer.

When we looked back from the engine, through the rain, to see the conductor's signal, I knew that instead of a "high-ball" to go it would be merely a "move-ahead" to crawl up the line before backing into clear on the siding. So when Joe Brown leaned out beside me and saw that "move-ahead" signal he clamped his grimy fingers on my arm and said: "Johnnie, that looks like a high-ball to me!"

We looked each other in the eye, steady as steel. It meant anarchy, of course, in the world where we belonged. It was against rules and against reason and against every principle of respectable railroading. But these things didn't seem to count on that run.

"It's a high-ball," I repeated. And with that we started. We let 'er out, and left the conductor on the platform. The front-end brakeman, who was in the know, merely sat tight. The rear brakeman dropped off at the switch, thinking, of course, that he was going to let us back in. But we never stopped. We never even hesitated. We shot system rules to pieces and

went pounding along our own outlaw way. Those little "goats" we used to run on the old D. and B. weren't much on a tonnage-drag but they could run like a wapiti. We hadn't a great number of cars on. And we swung down those hills toward home so fast it would have turned a "Pacific" on a passenger-run green with envy.

Going in, we had to face a mean curve at the end of a long drop. We daren't slow up, for fear we'd be giving No. 4 a chance to bust in our rear or No. 3 a chance to come nosing around that curve with her tongue in our face, as we were now on the time of both. Yet we knew well enough that if we went down that hill too fast we hadn't much of a chance of getting stopped before running into No. 3 if still at the station, since about one-half the brakes on that train of ours were "barefoot." So "Brakey" and I got on top with our sticks and the fireman got over on the pilot, to run for the switch. Joe stood working the whistle like a circus-calliope, screaming out through the dawning light to let No. 3 know, if she chanced to be moving our way. It was the sort of run that gives you an extra wrinkle or two around the eyes. And we made the last lap of it with our hearts in our mouths.

But we made it. We beat No. 4 to it and got into clear only eight minutes on her time. Luckily for us, the switch was around the curve and none of the other crews saw us pull in. So we united in swearing to the operator that the switch was "frozen" and that we'd had trouble getting it open. That, we maintained, was

our reason for whistling on the main line. But we beat No. 3 and registered in clear of her time. And we'd ended our run.

It was daylight by this time and I didn't wait to face the road trouble that was ahead of me. I slid down the track-shoulder and cut across wet fields and headed straight for the Newton house. I was so covered with oil and soot and mud that I must have looked a good deal like something just up from the Lower Regions. But I wasn't thinking about my personal appearance. I was thinking more about the fight with Archie Hueffer that stood just ahead of me. And I guess I wasn't any too gentle-looking a specimen of bohunk when I burst into Aggie Newton's house, without even so much as a knock on the door.

But there was no Swede Hueffer there. I'd beaten him to it. Aggie was alone in the kitchen as I stormed in, breaking an egg into a pot of coffee and looking so cool and quiet-eyed that she made me feel rather foolish. But I told her where I'd come from, and how I'd come, and just why I'd come. I took hold of her wrist and backed her against the kitchen-table. She put down the coffee-pot and studied my face. I expected to hear her say it was too late, for she pulled my fingers away from her wrist and walked over to the window and looked out. When she turned around again there wasn't much color left in her face.

"Did you go through that for me?" she said with a look of wonder in her eyes.

"I did," I told her, "and I'm going through a damned sight more to get you!"

It was pretty rough talk to hand out to a girl, to a young girl who wasn't used to roughness in men. But I don't believe she hated me for that roughness. For when I crossed over to her and took her in my oil-stained arms she didn't pull away. She wilted down against my wet shoulder and when her father walked into the kitchen she had her arms around my neck and I was kissing her.

He naturally wanted to know the meaning of things.

"John and I are going to be married Christmas week," Aggie told her father. She said it without a tremor. And I knew she meant it.

"Well, Swede Hueffer's out there," announced the old man, with a head-nod toward the house-drive. "He's out there with a horse and buggy, saying he has a right to see you."

Aggie's eye met mine.

"I'll do the talking for this family," I said. But something about my face, I suppose, made Aggie stop me before I got to the door. She must have felt there was going to be murder done on the old farm that morning.

"I'll talk to Archie," she said with a firmness I hadn't expected to find in her. And she did. I don't know what she said to him. But it must have been to the point. For, ten minutes later, he was lacing his big roan and throwing up the rut-mud as he went. And that pretty well settled things. I learned that morning, as I've learned before and after, that the man who intends to get anything in this world has

to go after it. The race belongs to the strong. And the harder the race the more you haul down. Yet an odd feature of it was, I never quite forgot that Archie Hueffer invasion on my claim, just as some inner part of my make-up never quite forgave Aggie for letting another even momentarily dispute my right. My pride was hurt. And about that time I gave up trying to understand women. I wanted Aggie Newton. I was determined to have her. And I'd won her back from the rival who so nearly took her away from me. But she was no longer the Aggie Newton I had dreamed about. Something came between us, something I could neither define nor drive away. I suppose if I'd been more of a lady's man I could have understood the situation better. But in those days I knew more about engines than I did about girls.

I swallowed my pill, however, and about six weeks later Aggie and I were married. I couldn't get time off for a wedding-trip.

There was a good deal of trouble, of course, about that wild freight-run on "smoke signals" and coming in without the rear-end men. But the boys were on my side, and it's queer how a wing-flap or two of romance will fan over the best man's code of ethics. Those boys, and even the conductor himself, lied like troopers and felt they were lying in a good cause. They not only all affirmed that signal in the rain to be a "high-ball," but the conductor himself protested he'd missed the van because it was going so fast. When a somewhat exasperated superintendent exam-

ined us for visual acuity, as the orders phrase it, he didn't find much wrong with our eyes. It was only our moral sense that was astigmatic. And when Aggie and I finally set up housekeeping in a little six-room frame house on Flint Street the boys gave us an ormolu clock and a big cut-glass water-set.

Swede Hueffer went down to Kentucky to work on a horse farm. He came back fat and red-faced. We never talked about him much, Aggie and I, but when the old feeling had pretty well faded out with time I used to tease her now and then about the blond-headed Lochinvar who'd got out to the farm too late in the morning.

It wasn't until Archie got into states prison, six or seven years later, for kiting one of his father's checks, that Aggie gave up looking downcast when I harped on how her old beau didn't even have the manners to appear broken-hearted over his loss. But she used to say she always hated to think it was a wicked lie about a conductor's signal that had really brought us together. And I used to tell her it was Fate. After Swede Hueffer was sent up I imagine she even got to believing I was right.

## CHAPTER IV.

I FIND it hard to remember those first years of my married life. I was happy in my home life, happy in my work, and happy in the thought that I was reinstating myself with Old Sam. And happiness seems to burn up its own memory, about the same as a well-stoked fire burns up its own smoke. I remember one day in my car asking Horner, the general manager of the Great Western, what he regarded as the best gift life could give him. His answer was: "Being at work and so wrapped up in it you're unconscious of the passage of time." And he wasn't so far wrong, all things considered. A man is given a big job, he wades into it, and as he works one impression is wiped out by the next and the years slip away and he suddenly wakes up and finds he isn't as young as he used to be. He gets a knock that carries him out of the game for a while and that gives him a chance to sit on the side-lines and wonder what it's all about.

I worked hard in those early days, not only because I loved the work, but because I had to. Old Sam wanted results, and it was up to me to show what I could do. And the old D. and B. couldn't afford idlers. All things considered, we had no right to survive. That backwoods road, so badly built, so badly



placed, seemed cut out for an early death. Our bigger rivals sat back and laughed at us—and while they were enjoying our weakness they gave us another breathing spell in which to get our wind and collect our wits. And in the end we lived, through the sheer will to live. We lived, and gathered strength, and grew in spite of those rivals who had sneered at our early littleness.

I had more and more a hand in that growth, for Old Sam more and more saw that I was to be depended on and advanced me from one position to another. That advance is not easy to explain, for railroad titles and positions are things of the moment, subject to ceaseless change and many altering shades of meaning. Through the growth of our larger systems, for example, and the resultant scarcity of titles, I've noticed that a general manager's duties quite often come to be performed by a vice-president and of late are covered by a president. Occasionally, it's true, a general manager will still have full scope and control, while the president will be the Wall Street man looking after the wider financial interests of the road. A superintendent, on the other hand, may have control of a division of from three hundred to five hundred miles, and sometimes more, while a general superintendent will have a district that embraces several divisions. So it's possible, to-day, for a general manager, who has no wider scope than the old-time general superintendents, to have a much wider territory, in some instances including two or more general superinten-

dents' districts, besides having full control of mechanical matters.

In the earlier days it was customary for the general manager to control traffic and the treasury, the accounting and the legal departments, and the purchase and stores department as well, but the title of president is now given to the officer coordinating these departments. The whole thing, however, is pretty fluid, and the later tendency is to delegate the specialized duties to specialized heads, called vice-presidents. So while titles over doors or in the corner of letter-heads may remain the same in type and lettering, strange changes can creep into the significance of those titles; one can fade away until it stands for little more than a sinecure discreetly endured, and the other can grow and take on acquired meaning until it masks the power behind the throne. And this is worth remembering, in view of certain things I must talk about later on.

Old Sam kept me as his secretary for over a year, and during that year, I think, I learned more than during any other year of my railroad life. Then, to serve his own ends, he made me trick dispatcher at divisional headquarters, where I had the actual directing of trains, the meeting and passing arrangements by "train orders," as provided for in "general train and interlocking rules." Then I was made chief dispatcher. That meant I had the distribution of power and stood actively and actually responsible for the movement of traffic, which was growing, of course, with the growth of our system. At that work I knew

what Old Sam wanted, and I gave it to him. And before another year was over I was trainmaster, and then assistant superintendent. That meant, on our system, that I was the man who hired and trained and supervised trainmen and yardmen and also looked after the station staffs. I was responsible for good discipline and the proper performance of work in train yards and the maintenance of efficiency in station service. And the first battle I had to fight, in that new job, was the cleaning up of the Detroit yards.

That was a mess which, in the rebuilding of our old Detroit River terminal and the rush of other work, had been month by month growing worse. It was a clot in our circulation and it was strangling the life out of our service. There were cars in that mix-up which had been lost for three months. Shippers were filing heartbreaking claims against us. Cars filled with perishable freight stood rotting on our tracks while traffic officials harried the head office with wrangling charges and counter-charges of poor facilities and inferior men. And the whole situation was steadily growing worse and worse as the Chicago traffic for which we'd fought like wolves accumulated on the outskirts of the city, where this fool's log-jam so calamitously slowed down its movement to its destination. Merchants were either cursing our incompetence or coming into our yards with a roll of bills and passing out bribes and greasing palms for the special privilege of getting some long-awaited car switched and unloaded. The office staff and the outdoor men

were at logger-heads, each accusing the other of not holding up their end. But the thing had to be straightened out. And I knew that Old Sam had faith in me, and would stand behind me in anything I did.

I'll never forget that slushy March morning when I took charge, arriving without a word to anybody. I walked down through those yards. It sickened me. It was like something living suddenly turned into offal. I saw ooze dripping from cars of potatoes that had rotted on our tracks. I saw carloads of milled lumber for which the builders had been waiting week by patient week. I broke a seal and looked into the gloom of a box-car where a shipment of up-state cheese had grown mouldy under its leaking roof and was now both an offense to the nostrils and a total loss to its owners. I broke another seal and found a carload of turnips turned into a foul pulp of decay. And I was just on the point of breaking another seal on a car of mixed freight when I felt something hard jabbed against my ribs and a heavy hand clutch me by the collar. I swung about to find myself confronted by a blue-jowled giant in a blue overcoat who merely tightened his grip on my collar as I tried to break away from him.

"You're the bird I've been lookin' for," he said, as he lifted his ugly-looking revolver from my ribs and flaunted it in my face. I began to realize, by this time, that he was one of our yard detectives.

"And what are you going to do with me?" I demanded, remembering that trailing around those dirty

cars hadn't added to my outward appearance. And I'd never been strong on personal decoration: I loved to remind Aggie, in fact, how Thackeray somewhere said the worst hats worn in Pall Mall probably belonged to dukes.

"I'm goin' to put you where you can learn what it costs to steal freight," that detective said with a jerk that knocked my hat off. "And if you don't come quiet and come quick I'm goin' to give you a crack on the bean with this gat."

I resented that threat. But I resented the way he was manhandling me even more.

"Wait a minute," I said with what coolness I could manage. "And get your hand off my collar or you'll lose your job so quick you won't know what struck you. I'm Rusk, John Rusk, in charge of this terminal."

"You're not even a clever liar," retorted the man with the revolver, giving my stooping body another jerk that kept me from picking up my hat, "and you're comin' with me if I have to knock you out and carry you."

I looked him over. He was a bull-head and he was armed with a gun. And there was something about his appearance persuaded me he wouldn't hesitate to use that gun, once I gave him the shadow of an excuse.

"Then take me to the yardmaster's office," I said to my captor.

"I'll take you where I damn please," he announced as he marched me along the heavy slush which the in-

competents in that yard hadn't had the energy to shovel from their switch-stands.

"Where are we going?" I asked, doing my best to keep cool.

"You're goin' where you can do a lot o' quiet thinkin'!" was his malignant retort.

"Do you know what this is going to cost you?" I just as malignantly demanded.

"Shut up," he said, jerking me across a track in front of a switching-engine. And I stopped short at that, feeling a flash of fire go through my outraged body. I stopped short, determined to end the farce then and there.

But the bull-head had his revolver-barrel against my breastbone before I could do anything. I could see his dull face darken with rage. I could also see the figure in oil-stained denim that swung down from the cab steps beside us. It was little Patsy Moran, who'd once worked with me on an engine up the line.

His eyes popped for a moment. But his wizened little face grew serious as he saw the gun in my captor's hand.

"What in the name o' Gawd are you trying to do, McMun?" he said as he elbowed protectively in between us.

"I'm takin' in a car-thief," retorted McMun, "and if he don't come quick he's——"

That was as far as he got. Moran's bunt sent the big hulk who'd been holding me staggering back a step or two.

*"That's the new superintendent, you fathead!"* the little engine-driver hissed at my oppressor.

The man called McMun let his arm go down, slow inch by inch. His jaw dropped with it. His face was the color of the old cheese back in the broken car.

"Go and get my hat," I told him. For I'd come there with something bigger than fatheads to fight against.

He went, meekly enough, wiping my wet hat-crown off with his handkerchief before he handed it back to me. There was a shake in his hand, I noticed, as he did so.

"I s'pose I'm fired?" he inquired, with a bass quaver in his voice.

I didn't even answer him. It all seemed so futile and foolish and beside the mark. Yet it was significant of the condition confronting me.

"What d' you want me to do, sir?" persisted McMun, still standing at attention in front of me. I shut my eyes for a minute or two, to get a grip on the bigger trend of things. I wanted to do the right thing.

"No, you're not fired," I finally told him. "Get back on your job and protect your yards. But if you've got a little power, don't let it go to your head."

He said, "Thank you, sir," and turned away. I stood watching him as he walked off down the track. And McMun, I might add, stayed with the D. and B. and became one of our most reliable men during the labor trouble that was to come to us later on. And,

odd as it may sound, he became and remained one of my staunchest friends.

But I had other things to worry about, at the moment. I turned to the little engine-driver beside me.

"Patsy," I said, "what's wrong with this yard, man to man?"

Patsy shrugged a shoulder, took a chew, and squinted about at the tangle of traffic that looked more like worms in a bait-tin than the organized lines of a system outlet.

"That's a hard nut to crack, Mr. Rusk," he said when he got ready. "But to me it looks like the old scrap between the inside and the outside forces. The yard boys are willing to work. Gawd knows, they're willing! They've been doing overtime until they're ready to drop, switching here in the sleet and snow and getting called down for what seemed the best moves to make."

"Are they following orders?" I demanded.

"That's just the trouble. There's conflict of authority around here and that means the orders are confusing. And because you can't follow two heads it just slumps over into a case of passing the buck."

"But why should there be disputed authority?"

"That's not for me to say," contended Patsy. "But if you're asking me as an old pit-friend and not as an official, I'd say most of the trouble starts with Mr. Page. He's the construction engineer they brought from Boston to manage the new work here. I understand the president wants him to have control here un-



til his job is cleaned up, so he can show a low cost, within the appropriation. But, faith, an engineer isn't an operating official and while he's building freight-tracks he's interfering with the routine movement of the freight that goes over 'em. And you've got your answer, right around you."

The answer was there, all right.

"Then Page is the man I want to see," I said. And I started for his office while I was still hot under the collar. But Javan Page, luckily for me, hadn't yet got down to his desk that morning. For I had no knowledge, at the time, that Page was a board pet who'd been imported from the East on the strength of a bond-issue he and his family had been able to swing for Old Sam. I had no idea he had a double-knotted cinch on his new job—and it was just as well, all things considered, that I failed to get in touch with him that morning.

So instead of having it out with the man in control of the new construction I went down to the yard offices and looked them over. The building was nothing to be proud of. It contained a dark hallway and a ramshackle row of badly-lighted pens, one shut off from the other, a heritage from our pioneer days when everything went to roadbed and rolling-stock and blamed little to interior trimming. But the principle of the thing, I felt, was all wrong. Here were a group of men, supposed to be working in common, in complete harmony, shut off from one another like animals in a zoo, penned up like rabid dogs in a row of kennels.

I called Spaidel, my chief clerk, and had a heart to heart talk with that none too happy man.

"I want a change here," I told him, "and we're going to count off exactly six days to make it in. You've got a dirty hole here and you're doing dirty work in it. I want those partitions torn out and I want bigger windows cut in those walls. Instead of these pens I want a well-lighted, a well-aired, and an orderly room of workers, all directly under your eye. For I've found a shirker loves seclusion, while a real worker welcomes inspection. I want you to make this room look like a city bank. And I want it conducted in as orderly a way as a city bank is conducted. Is that clear?"

Spaidel acknowledged that it was clear. But the same epithet couldn't be applied to his own eye as he said it.

"And any instructions that come in," I continued, "or any orders that go out, must be as carefully respected as though they were yellow-backs in the four-figure run. Is that also clear?"

I could see a dazed sort of opposition in Spaidel's face, but he said, "Yes, sir," promptly enough.

"And now I want the yard-master in here for a conference. I want to see why every car in this yard isn't in its proper place and in its proper place *at the proper time*. I want to see who's responsible for the rotten lack of system around here. And you may as well let it be known that if this carelessness isn't ended inside of a week there's going to be some vacant jobs around this yard!"

I got the yard-master inside and we went all over the mess once more. It was only too plain that the gears weren't meshing right. And the machine couldn't run without harmony, without systematic routine. There were excuses and complaints and explanations enough, but that sort of thing, naturally, wasn't getting results.

"I'm not here to take sides," I finally told the men. "I'm here to clean up this yard. And if I can't clean it up I'll clean it out. There seems to be a purely local dispute as to who's boss. Well, from now on, *I'm boss!* And if I can't get cars switched and trains out on time—if I can't get that service from this outfit I'll put in a bunch of girls who'll at least do what they're told. I want every car-label, every switch-list, and every other scrap of paper issued from these offices acted on and acted on promptly. I don't want any more second and third and fourth requests for movements. A second request, after to-day, goes down as a death-warrant to the bird who gets it. Is that clear?"

The yard-master inspected me with a morose eye.

"Can you make your construction engineer conform to our routine?" he inquired. And I didn't altogether like his tone.

"He'll understand," I said with my jaw shut as Spaidel went on to explain that the six-months old shipment of white pine, on which the company had paid claims, had been mistakenly appropriated by Javan Page for his construction work, instead of going to

the dealers who'd begged and bribed around for their deliveries.

"There'll be no more of that," was my prompt ultimatum. But more and more, through it all, I felt that the king-pin of the trouble lay in the person of Mr. Javan Page.

I didn't look Page up that day. I wanted to be dead sure of my ground first. So I wired for three of my staff boys and while I made an investigation of the inside office workings I had my three lads supervise the making of an inventory of that yard, every car and number and where it stood and where it came from and how long it had been there and what it held, and where it was going, even though we had to break seals and examine markings and tags and manicure gunny-sacks to find out what we wanted. Then I cross-examined the switchman on the different leads and tried to feel out why they weren't able to carry out orders and keep their tracks clean. And when I'd got my results assorted I was ready for Page.

I went to his office the next morning and waited forty-five minutes for him to put in an appearance. It was a very nice office. It was filled with new cherry-wood furniture and on his desk he had a small cut-glass vase holding three white carnations and a large silver frame holding a photograph of a very haughty-looking woman.

I was mighty interested in that man, Page, by the time he arrived. And when he stepped into the office I found him a narrow-faced and slender-bodied indi-

vidual wearing spats on his ankles and a small red flower in his buttonhole. He had a thin high forehead and a remarkably cool eye, to say nothing of an acid and one-sided smile that wasn't without a touch of half-careless mockery. He was a new type to me in the railway world. But from the moment I clapped eyes on him I disliked him.

When I told him who I was he produced a chased gold cigarette-case and blandly offered me a cigarette. A cigarette, in those days, was looked on as a trifle effeminate. So I may have snorted aloud when I declined his dude-killer. He smiled his lemon-juice smile as he sat down and struck a match. Then he rather indolently inquired what he could do for me.

"I guess we can get down to business quickest," I retorted, "when we find out what you can do for the D. and B."

"That's interesting," he quietly acknowledged. "And just what *can* I do for the D. and B.?"

I was younger at the game then or I wouldn't have been so ready to show my teeth. There are different ways of fighting, in this world, and the bigger the problem the less likely you are to bite your way through it.

"You can either stop interfering with the running of these yards," I told him, "or give up the job."

He took out another cigarette and lighted it.

"Just what's wrong with the yards?" he casually inquired

I told him, in a few curt sentences, just what had

happened to our service at that point. He stopped me with a wave of his girlish white hand.

"But, my dear chap, you're making the primary mistake of barking up the wrong tree. I'm not a railway operative. I'm an engineer; the chief engineer of this terminal work for the time being. And I'm not running your yards."

"You're interfering with their operation," I retorted.

"On the contrary, I'm doing difficult construction work under almost maddening conditions. I'm carrying out the plans Mr. Callard wants carried out and when he has his new sidings and engine-house and sheds he will probably be able to give better service."

"But he's got to start giving good service to-day," I shouted, "or all you're building here is a tombstone."

"Then why not talk to Mr. Callard about it," was Javan Page's quiet suggestion. And his very quietness, I felt, was a reproof for my unseemly roughness.

"I prefer to talk to you," I said with a thump on the desk-end that made his carnation-vase dance.

"I'm sorry I can't participate in that desire," he said as he pushed a buzzer-button with his white finger.

"Then you'll probably not participate long in your present job," I was foolish enough to fling back at him. And his fastidious thin face hardened a little at that open and unmistakable threat.

"My dear man, I anticipate being an official of this road much longer than you are," he said with a cool assurance which didn't do much to calm me down.

We stood there, studying each other for a full minute, our glances locked together like elk-horns. And I knew I hated him. He made me think of a rattlesnake, suave and smooth and full of grace, but fortified with the knowledge that he had a venomous power behind him.

"I don't imagine this road's going to be big enough to hold both of us," I said as I started for the door. He merely smiled, with a ghost of a shrug. But there was nothing ghost-like in the way I slammed that door after me.

Five hours later I had Old Sam down on the scene. I knew there had to be a clean-up in that neighborhood without any loss of time. And I imagined my chief was ready to stand behind any move I made to effect that clean-up.

But for once in his life Old Sam straddled. He worked a shaggy eyebrow up and down as I laid my ultimatum as to Javan Page in front of him and let a mask fall over his wrinkled old face and remarked that surgical operations had sometimes been known to kill the patient. I didn't realize it at the time, of course, but our chief was in a pretty delicate position just then. He was reaching out for his eastern connection and was staking his last dollar on absorbing a second run-down system that had to be held up by his home road and wet-nursed back into a semblance of honest vigor. He was trying to swallow something three times his own size and he was gagging like a boa constrictor with a baby lamb in its gullet. But what he went after

he got, and what he got he made his own. He had his worries, however, during the period of absorption, and his present one was having a college-made incompetent imposed on him by his new board. He didn't want to cramp my stroke. But he told me in so many words, that he couldn't afford to fire Javan Page.

So, like the astute old diplomat he was, he struck a compromise. He reported satisfaction to Page at his progress, and gave him a new man, ostensibly a subordinate, to look after the outside operations, relieving the chief engineer of the so-called trivial distractions of the actual work. These, it was pointed out, might hamper the more important preparation of plans in the inside office. Then he told me to get busy and clean up the mess in my own way. I could do what I wanted, but while doing it I had to keep Page's men supplied with material and assure him and the long-neglected public of prompt switching.

I made a job of it, all right. Both Page and the general public began to get service. I guess they still tell about it back on that section of the system. It gave the stove-committee in every roundhouse something to hot-air about and even made a white-collar nabob or two on neighboring lines open his eyes. But in two weeks I had that yard as neat as a row of harp-strings. I had those engines and cars working together like the wheels of a Hoe press. I had a new office system and a proper allotment of responsibility and no more squabbling delays and lost cars and claims from sore-head shippers. I couldn't claim to be a college grad-



uate, but I knew what could be done in the matter of fanning out and switching box-cars and I knew what you could get out of office men if you put them on their mettle and what you could get out of a yard gang if you gave them a fighting chance to do their work in a way they'd been trained to do it. I'd been a worker myself and I'd already learned that labor wasn't a commodity to be traded in. I realized that the good will of the men who worked under you was the biggest asset you could take into a big job, and if there was a kicker on my pay-roll I always asked him to come right to me with his kick.

## CHAPTER V.

I HAD expected, and secretly hoped for, some open opposition from Javan Page before I got through with my Detroit job. But he fooled me there. He was cool and casual, during our few accidental contacts, and had apparently decided to let bygones be bygones. I saw nothing of him until six months later when I was delegated, because of my position, to take charge of the president's train while he was showing some "eastern money" over our north midland division. This party was made up of a white-collar bunch with their wives and daughters, prospective investors whom Old Sam was jollyng along and showing the more presentable aspects of the D. and B. In addition to my official position as superintendent I was supposed to answer all random questions, foolish or otherwise, and do what a native rough-neck could to keep the ladies amused.

It wasn't work to my liking, but I had to go through with it. And it didn't add to my happiness to find the Javan Pages so well represented in that party. For Javan Page was there himself, always on a cordial enough basis with his eastern friends but always studying me, I felt, with a slightly commiserative eye which slightly cramped my style as an entertainer. And his

wife was there, as the daughter of Marcus Delane, the doddering old Boston millionaire who'd been on our board since the days of the first reorganization. And with her she had her pert-faced and imperious-mannered little daughter, Lavinia, whom I disliked so much that I secretly rejoiced when the bumble-bee stung her where I'd been secretly itching to spank her. She was an insolent-minded little autocrat, was Miss Lavinia, but she came by it honestly. For I know of no one who could parade more good manners and bad taste than this same Mrs. Javan Page. She was, or at least she had been, a beautiful woman, with thin fine lips and thin fine nostrils and a thin fine figure, a hard and selfish woman armor-plated in a shell of shining self-absorption. I'm afraid she rather disliked me, from the first, in an indolent and insolent sort of way, but like all dislikes I imagine it had its background of fear, even though she wouldn't admit it to her own mind. I was too open and rough for her. I belonged to the future and she belonged to the past. I was a comer and she was a has-been. But she had a branding-iron of a tongue. She could plaster the hot metal against a man's ribs as casually as a cowboy burns a letter on a calf's hide. She announced, with her habitual smile of mockery, that I carried my modesty about as conspicuously as a live-oak carries its Spanish moss. She did her little best to make me feel like a man flying a box-kite while a Curtis bi-plane is stunting along the sky-line. But I pretended not to notice those claw-strokes of hers. It took con-

siderable self-control, but I never let her really ruffle me. Even when I overheard her speak of me as "that funny man" I swallowed the insult that had a double edge because it had been deliberate, and came up smiling. But I carried the memory of it carefully along with me, as carefully as a boy carries a crow's egg down an elm tree in his mouth, not caring to bite on what had gone bad before he came into possession of it. To her, apparently, everything west of Tuxedo Park was wilderness. And *I* was the thorny cactus of the desert.

Yet I learned a lot from Aurelia Page. I learned that women wield a power of their own, a power you can't always fight and define. Without knowing it, she taught me to be less primitive, to control the purely animal-like instincts to strike back when struck. She taught me to wear a smile when I really wanted to plant a left-arm jab. She made me eat humble-pie, too, in her own quiet way. And that diet, I suppose, is always good for a self-centered man. But with all her hardness and all her cruelty an occasion arose when she puzzled me.

Three of the ladies had wanted to see Angel Spray Falls by moonlight, one night when the men were deep in their poker game. Now, I'd never played cards, always feeling that life was a little too short to do all the things we wanted to do, without inventing elaborate games to shorten it still more. So I volunteered to take the three sightseers through on a motor-car, for the falls were up a rusty-railed mill spur that hadn't known an engine-wheel for a year.

It was a glorious night, with a moon like a cart-wheel. We had to ford the Angel Spray, below the cataract, to get a proper view of the Falls. So I carried the ladies over, one by one, knee-deep in the rushing water. The first two went without comment. I was half-expecting Aurelia Page to object to that over-personal method of transportation, but she laughed a little as I took her up and her thin arm circled a little tighter about my neck as I waded out into the tumbling stream. She was thin and bony, and easy enough to carry, and I remember even being conscious of the winey smell of her breath—they'd drunk champagne that night as usual for dinner—together with the smell of a rather musky perfume with which she must have anointed herself. That sort of thing didn't make much impression on me, however. I was thinking, in fact, how easy it would be to toss that particular lady over my shoulder and let her go gasping and gurgling down those moonlit rapids. It even occurred to me that with a pretended slip I could give her a good dousing in the cold river-water and wash away some of that dignity of hers. But I didn't do either. I simply carried her quietly across the ford and climbed up on the rocky shore, stopping and still holding her up in my arms when I got there, wondering why she had never spoken a word.

"Wait a moment," she finally said, not looking at me but at the moon that hung dull gold above the black-fringe of the tree-tops. I could feel her breast drink in the slightly balsamic air, for her arm was still closely linked about my neck.

Then she looked down at my face. I was thinking, at the time, that women no longer young could still look youthful in the right sort of light. But, on the whole, I felt anything but comfortable.

"We may die and rot, dear man, before we see such a moon again!" Aurelia Page said with a sigh that stirred my hair. For her face was quite close to mine and I could feel her thin arm tighten about my neck. But something about that face, when I turned and looked at it, tended to perplex me. The moonlight shone full on it and her eyes were half closed. But what she did the next moment perplexed me still more. For she lifted her free hand and thrust her thin fingers deep into my hair and pushed my head back so that her staring eyes were not a half-foot away from my face. I could even feel her breath on my skin. "*You wonderful brute!*" she said in a sort of startled gasp. . . . I didn't quite understand, at the time. The one word I heard and understood was the word "brute." And that blinded me to everything else. I plumped her down as though she had been a sack of oats and walked over to where the other two women were calling to me from the rocks.

But Aurelia Page did not speak to me again that night. She stood silent as we watched the falls. And she remained silent all the way back to the car. There were times, in fact, later on when I imagined the thing had never happened. It seemed absurd and incredible, like something remembered out of a dream, too unreal to be accepted by reason.

But the excursion went on again, about the same as before. Old Sam wanted the best side of his road shown up, and it was my job to do it. As far as I could make out, however, that party seemed more interested in playing cards than inspecting roadbeds. They talked more about trout-fishing than grade-reduction. So when we stopped at Green Lake they were all for trying their luck there. Now, as I've already said, fishing has been the one recreation of my long and busy career. I'd learned to fish before I was chin-high to a hop-toad, and I'd always loved to slip away for an hour or two, when the chance came, even though I was facing troubles enough to turn a man whiteheaded over night. I've made it a fixed practice, in fact, to carry my fishing-tackle along with me in my business car and to ease things off, when we were in the lake country, by a few hours where I could hear water ripple and feel the electric thrill of a good "strike" and land my beauty after a fight that was hard enough to threaten his loss. It's about the only sort of idling I've ever done. And I've always felt it was time well invested.

So I was a trifle worried when Old Sam told me he wanted that party to feel they were in a real fishing country, since he had seventeen hundred acres of wild land he hoped to dispose of to one of the old birds for a summer camp. I knew there was about as poor fishing in Green Lake as there was anywhere along the whole line. But I resented Javan Page saying so to his carful of friends, that night after dinner. And

when a young Mrs. Rumley, who'd become quite friendly and liked to talk to me about pioneer days in the Middle West, asked me if the two of us couldn't go out and bring in a string of fish from Green Lake the next morning, I solemnly asserted that we could. It was a sort of challenge, and I couldn't afford to let it go by.

But I knew my country and my company well enough not to take foolish chances. A crate of about a dozen fair-sized Lake Superior white-fish had been shipped down for the dining-car that day and were still in ice. So under cover of darkness that night I had Larson, the *chef*, string those white-fish together and *cache* them in a little cove down on the lake. The next morning Mrs. Rumley and I started out at sun-up for our fishing. She caused me considerable worry by wanting to stay right with me, for the wilder the country, I've noticed, the more companionable a woman's apt to get. But I finally posted her on a deep-water rock where I told her she'd have her best chance for black bass. I left her there and worked my way up into the cove. As luck would have it, the lady actually hooked a three-pounder—probably the last in the lake—and promptly screamed for help. She screamed again when I walked out on her rock with my eleven shiny big white-fish trailing from my side. I landed her bass for her, and we called it a day.

We got a rousing cheer when we scrambled back to the car, and Mrs. Rumley insisted on passing her three-pounder around for inspection. But I made it a



point to get my white-fish back to the *chef's* hand before they were looked over at short range. We had a fish feast, that noon, and there was a good deal of banter about my taking a young married woman out in the woods so early in the morning. But the proof of the pudding was in the eating, and they all ate heartily enough, with the mendacious Larson pointing out which was lake trout and which was rock bass and which was yellow pickerel.

And Old Sam, I might point out in passing, eventually sold his wild land to the enthusiastic gentlemen from the East.

When we got farther up into the "bush" the thoughts and hopes of that party naturally turned toward big game. As some of them were sitting out "on the observation end," going through one of our wilder valleys, they actually got a glimpse of a bear-cub scampering off up the hills. That worked them up to fever heat, especially the women-folk. Mrs. Rumley asked me in her clinging-vine way if I couldn't get a real moose for them, or at least a deer. And remembering certain things, I told her she'd have her moose before the day was over.

For I recalled Syd Orkin, a settler in a clearing beyond the second station, who'd caught and tamed a moose-calf. He'd brought it up on cow's milk, along with his regular calves, had made a harness for it, and had once made a hit at one of the country fairs by exhibiting it as a "trotting moose." It was enough of a pet to follow its owner around for tidbits, as placid as

an army mule, and Syd used to tease it by holding half an apple just beyond reach of its thick-lipped snout. So I wired ahead to the agent and gave him our time and told him to have Syd and his moose somewhere close along our right-of-way as we rolled past. I instructed Silver, on the front end, to slow up when he spotted Syd, but not to tarry long enough to give those easterners a chance to ask questions. I made it a point to be good and busy going through a file of reports from the home-office when we rounded the curve at the Orkin clearing. And then, sure enough, I heard a sudden chorus of screams from the ladies, and a scramble through the car by the men. For there was Syd's moose, as large as life, looking like something that had stepped out of the Pliocene Age, standing close beside the track, with his head held high, as we rolled past. But Javan Page's pompous old uncle happened to be eating a Baldwin apple on the back platform, at the moment. And when Orkin's moose sniffed that apple he just naturally turned and trotted after our train until he was able to reach up and grab that Baldwin out of the old gentleman's hand, about the same as a dog will grab a bone from your fingers.

I guess that gave them something to talk about, for the next day or two. And when Mrs. Rumley cornered me and fixed me with her soulful young eyes and inquired as to the eating-habits of the American moose I was compelled to tell her that scarcity of food often made them quite docile and that they'd been known to snatch oranges from the train children as

they went by. Mrs. Rumley solemnly admitted that this must be true as she'd seen the razorbacks down in Florida fighting around the Fernandina train-wheels for the banana skins thrown out of the car windows. And I might also explain that Syd Orkin later claimed that one of our fool party shot a gun off, from a car window, and came within an ace of putting a bullet through his pet. I'd neither seen nor heard anything of that, in the excitement, and each member of the party, when interrogated, indignantly denied any such murderous intent against so noble an animal. But a nice old lady from Brookline, who'd been a pioneer woman in the New Brunswick bush before her husband made two or three million dollars out of timber-limits, had a twinkle in her eye when she told me the following night at dinner that she'd often heard of belling the cat but never knew that the wild moose grew a dinner-bell behind its dewlap. The old lady enjoyed my embarrassment but was generous enough not to pass the secret on. For Syd Orkin, sure enough, had the habit of strapping a cow-bell around that moose's neck, to help him locate his pet when it went browsing off among the slash. And in the excitement he'd forgotten to unbuckle that darn fool bell-strap.

## CHAPTER VI

**B**UT life wasn't exactly a bed of roses in those days. There was hard work to be done, and I had my share of it, even though it's the occasional kick over the traces, oddly enough, that now stands out clearest in my memory. They were the green oases in the gray Sahara of toil. Fishing-parties were pleasant enough, but they were merely breathing-spells in a bitter and never-ending war to survive.

Old Sam was about as worried as a farmer fighting red-root. He was worried about his finances, and about his eastern connections, and about the labor trouble that he was long-headed enough to foresee. And, to add to his problems, he found himself with a rate-war on his hands. We were still an aggregation of scalping-parties, knifing and being knifed, just feeling our way into that better era where railway regulation first began as a cooperative control of conduct, to the end that we might do away with over-costly competitive campaigns and weed out unethical and self-destructive rivalries. That was before the regulation of rates and before the still later regulation of profits and before the newer-fangled regulation of mergers. There are those who claim, of course, that our transportation laws have never been as savage toward the

roads as those roads were toward one another, that this legislation is not punitive but protective. And when I look back at the savagery of those old rate-wars I sometimes feel there may be a shadow of truth in the claim. For in the fight I speak of we fought without hope of gain; we fought blindly and brutally; we fought only to hurt an enemy who was hurting us. When we found that enemy had resorted to secret rebates, we made a public announcement of a twenty-percent. reduction in all passenger rates. That cut was promptly met by our rival and we as promptly made another cut. We slaughtered rates until we were hauling people six hundred miles for two dollars and sixty cents. We not only let them crowd into our comfortable coaches and be carried from point to point at a dead loss, but we gave them free meals and coaxed them aboard and advertised for more, and asked for more. We didn't get enough out of that traffic to pay for the oil in our journal-boxes—but the war was on, and it was not for us to give up or give in. We almost knocked people down and dragged them aboard. We linked up with an eastern connection who had in turn linked up with a contending steamship line and together we carried happy and incredulous immigrants from the wharves of Hamburg and Bremen and Liverpool and Cherbourg right across the Atlantic and on to the rich plains of the Middle West for the suicidal rate of twelve dollars a passenger. And in the freight rates it was still worse. The thing could not, of course, go on. It was cutthroat tactics. But neither of us could cry quits.

Old Sam was a good fighter. But he fought with his head as well as his fists. He saw that the two of us would go down locked together like a couple of embattled stags. And there was neither glory nor gold in that. So he looked for a way out.

When he called me into his office and told me he wanted me to go to New York to represent him at a special meeting of the Traffic Association I thought at first, since our traffic officer was in bed with bronchitis, that the big boss was sidestepping a responsibility peculiarly his own. But I saw, in the end, that it was another instance of his sagacity, a case of keeping the capital ship in harbor while the mere destroyer did the scouting. And I was to go as the destroyer, in more ways than one. I was to go as a fighter, challenging our enemy, openly eager for more fray, ready for another winter and still another summer of rate-slashing, if need be, and openly scornful of the differentials which they had already proffered us in view of our less direct haul. We were satisfied—and we were to tell them so. But that, of course, was a mere theatricality. It was more than a theatricality, for a few more months of that warfare would have run us into the ground. I was to screen our bleeding flanks, make my jauntiest parade of power—and wring from the mild-mannered association as quick and as favorable a verdict as such determined ferocity as ours could elicit. In plain English, we were licked—but we refused to know it. And we were even more determined not to let the other fellow know it.

I was considerably keyed up about that visit to New York, for I'd never seen the big city and it had all the glamour of the unknown. I'd stared at Milwaukee, of course, stared at it from the lake and seen it so incredibly lovely in the morning light that I used to wonder if old Athens itself ever looked more stately from the Phalerim Road. I'd seen San Francisco flowing over its golden hills at sunset and more than once my frontier blood had thrilled with foolish pride at the tumbled beauty of that guardian of our western coast with its eyes on the West that so mysteriously became the East. I was also no stranger to Chicago, it's true, and had always liked her morning pall of smoke between lake and plain, with her crowded Loop and her windy corners and her suggestion of youthful strength and frontier vigor waiting to be tamed. But she was a riddle already read, holding none of the mystery of the remoter city on the Hudson.

New York, in some way, seemed the final end of the none too definite road along which I was groping, for it was there men foregathered for the final fight and the final prize. It was the arena of the giants, the ultimate testing-ground of American success, the home-circle of the New World's wealth and power. As a mere midwesterner I pretended to be hostile to it, harping blithely enough and often enough on the old string of its Sodom and Gomorrah effeteness. I derided it because I was secretly afraid of it. I scoffed at it because I had never attained to it. I tried to laugh at it because I wanted to lower it to a more compre-

hensible plane. But it both mystified and intimidated me. So, naturally enough, I pretended to hate it. Fear, if we're only honest enough to admit it, lies somewhere at the background of every antipathy.

Old Sam may have seen that I needed that journey into the East, whence the Wise Men once came and whither the wise men now go. My first visit to New York, at any rate, did me good. It widened my vision. It put a crimp or two in my ego. It made me feel small, made me feel alien and trivial and inconsequential and at the same time teased me with a hunger to thrust myself above its million-throated mediocrities. It elated me with its movement and at the same time depressed me with the vague melancholy of its immensity, the same melancholy I'd so often found in my home pinelands and the open prairies and the lonely Rockies that remind man of his littleness in a world where he lives so briefly.

It was early morning when I landed at Hoboken. To reach New York from the west, in those days, it was, with a single exception, necessary to cross the Hudson on one of the river-ferries. As I followed my fellow-passengers toward the slips where I could hear the churning of tide-waters and the tinkle of pawl-and-ratchet and the cough of harbor-tugs, I found myself caught up by a wider stream of human traffic crowding over the double-decked gangways. These were the commuters trekking cityward from their Jersey homes. Between them rumbled trucks and wagons where the twin rows of draught-horses made the splintered tim-



bers smell like a stable. But from the upper deck I could smell sea air. It was different from any air I had ever smelled before, heavy yet at the same time disturbingly pungent, watery and warm and touched with wonder.

I leaned against the guard-chain, on the lip of the upper deck, drinking in my first glimpse of New York as we forged out of the slip and headed for the thousand-towered island beyond the drifting mile of tide-water a-ripple in the morning sunlight. Gulls croaked and called around us, harbor-craft shuttled back and forth, car-scows crawled up and down the current, tugs with mat-covered bows tooted for their right of way, even a war-ship lay at anchor in mid-stream. But I wasted little time on any of these things. What caught and held my attention was the panorama of the city that lay ahead of me, rising in one compact and imperial whole out of the water that laved its feet. The skyscrapers of that day were not so high as they are today; the liners berthed in their shore-stalls were not so gigantic as the *Leviathans* and the *Berengarias* of this later generation; the city itself had not spilled out over its island triangle until its environs were ten times greater than its core. But it was pageant enough for me. It brought me the same thrill that band-music used to bring me in the days of my youth. For I saw a castellated sky-line of towers and roofs and domes, some golden in the morning light, some clear-cut as the teeth of a trap, some mysterious with shadow and dream-like with the opal mist that drifted in from the

Upper Bay and hung like a scarf about the throat of the Battery. I could see the buildings rise, tier by tier, gilded cornice by cornice, about the same as the foothills rise into the Rockies, until the topmost peaks stood misted blue against the stronger blue of the sky. And for some reason or other they looked mighty romantic to me. As I said before, I'd seen Chicago often enough smoke-crowned above the morning prairie, and it had the beauty of a young giant waking up to his unconsidered strength. And I'd often felt that my own city of Detroit, seated on its sky-blue river between two flashing lakes, lordly and lusty on the fringe of its lordly and lusty mid-west, was as pretty a picture as the eye of man could look on. But New York was different. It was more than pretty. It was the center of things, the market-place of power. It was where men came to try their strength in the Big Game, and went up or went down according to the power they had behind their pretenses. It gave you a chance for the big gamble. It made you a success or a failure.

And to me, that morning, it was a good deal like a drink of gin. It stirred something that hadn't been often stirred in that sullen body of mine and I had a foolish impulse to stretch out my arm and say: "Some day I'll have my heel on your neck! Some day, instead of bunting me about like a calf in a corral, your crowds will step aside and say, 'There goes John Rusk!'"

It was, of course, a mood and nothing more. It didn't even last long, for I had troubles enough as soon as I landed on that hostile island where they seemed to

work as hard as they played. It took a little of the wind out of my sails. It reminded me that I was still a pretty small pebble on the beach of railroad operation. It even made me a little ashamed of my clothes. And what was more, it made me ashamed of my roughness. It taught me a new respect for system and established authority. My earlier training had combined to persuade me that railroading was mostly a triumph of physical force, that it was human driving-power that usually got results. And I was right enough, in a way. For the physical-force man can clean up local spots and pound crooked lines straight. He can do that through sheer fist-power. But that makes for a one-man road, and when the man "checks-in" his method collapses. It doesn't make the system right—and it's the system that counts. For unless the system is right the newcomer has to learn the lesson all over again. And that's how we still seem to be railroading to-day, with each road and each era going back to fundamentals again and fighting its way toward its own tricks in operation and transportation, its own methods of solving the same old problems. I'd never had much sympathy with the college theorist, outside the engineering department, for I felt a man ought to work up from the bottom and not down from the top. But during that New York visit of mine I bumped into the disturbing discovery that a man could wear a butterfly tie and still be a financier, just as he could indulge in the luxury of spats and at the same time design a locomotive. I confronted my colleagues in a chamber of

polished wood and soft rugs up on the fourteenth floor of a marble-faced building with mirror-set elevators with uniformed attendants, and in the midst of that universal order and quietness I felt secretly ill at ease. And that, I suppose, tended to make me even more aggressive. They probably accepted me as something new and wild and woolly out of the West. And I probably was—but I didn't let them run away with the idea I was a weakling. I took my stand and made my speech and fought for my cause with every ounce of bitterness in my body. They laughed at me, in the beginning, sensing something ludicrous in my heroics. But they weren't laughing much when I got through and our rate question was thrown open for discussion. I was in unknown territory and in the midst of unknown adversaries. But I knew my subject and wasn't to be shaken from my position. I watched every move and parried every thrust. And in the end I won my point for Old Sam and the D. and B. We got our differentials approved and a promise of interchange of traffic and a chance to live. I sat with a match over the powder-keg until they saw I meant business. I even lost sight of the fact, as I played my rôle out to the bitter end, that I was threatening to blow myself up along with the rest of them. But I gave it to them straight from the shoulder. And nothing succeeds like sincerity. And you can't put too much thunder into your claim, when your cause is weak.

I was tired out, after that fight, and I remember going to the window while the final vote was being

taken and staring down at the widening North River and the Upper Bay. To me it looked like an open mouth singing a never-ending song toward Europe. It was a mouth full of the music of commerce—and I wanted to have a hand in its making. I could see twenty million tons rolling into it, and twenty million tons rolling out of it, season by season. I could see wheat-trains flowing toward it, across the autumn hills. I could see coal and corn, steel and stone, lumber and live-stock, converging toward that tapering triangle that swarmed with its straitened crowds. And crowds, to me, meant crowds to carry, crowds to shuttle back and forth to the surrounding country, crowds to lift inland and crowds to waft seaward, crowds that would more and more seek to travel on wheels.

And above all things I wanted to learn the orchestration of those crowds. I wanted the power and knowledge to handle them, to carry to them the fruits of other men's toil. I may have been a rough-neck with baggy trousers and linen soiled with sweat, but for a few minutes there something with wings crouched warm in the nest of my soul.

Yet I felt oddly old and depressed, during the rest of my hurried stay in New York. The city once more dwarfed me into insignificance and the light-heartedness of my fellow-officials left me moody and morose. I seemed older in spirit than my kind. And this more than ever came home to me when, on my last day, I met Smallwood of the Central. My visit to him was a

routine one. But the impression I carried away was exceptional. And it helped me along in that belated hand-made education of mine.

I'd heard a good deal of Smallwood, for a year or two, and when I got into his office I expected to see a grizzled veteran with three chins over his collar and a bay-window under his vest. Instead of that I found myself face to face with a stripling of about twenty-six or twenty-seven. He had a smooth face and a clear eye and he was at the phone, talking over long distance, when I was shown into an office without a cuspidor on the Chinese rug. Smallwood smiled and good-naturedly waved me into a seat and kept me waiting there for exactly twenty-two minutes.

But I didn't regret that wait. I learned something. For Smallwood stopped long enough to explain that he was calling up a yard-master on the Ashburton Branch, five hundred miles away. Then the general superintendent was called up. I could see Smallwood jotting down data as to loadings and deliveries, figures as to car-movements, facts that came in to him over five hundred miles of wire. And I was naturally interested. When he got through I asked him, man to man, why he used that direct personal-contact method instead of having the usual formal reports coming in through the usual organized channels. For it was, of course, a new trick at running the old game.

He laughed in a boyish sort of way and said he'd always worked it in that fashion since he was a yard clerk. And, what was more, it was still standing the

acid-test of the more extended operations. He used the same method, in fact, with each of his divisions. He'd had the acumen and the energy to go over each one of his terminals, mile by mile and point by point. He'd walked every foot of the yards and faced every yard-master and official and made himself acquainted with every physical peculiarity of every district. That meant he carried back with him a first-hand knowledge of what lay out there on the firing-line. The result was that he could take a report and at once visualize the territory to which it applied. His camera-eye at once painted every detail of the full picture those figures suggested. And that gave him a chance to understand conditions and estimate results. What was more, his crisp morning talk with each of his officials kept his contacts humanized, kept his fighting-line alert and responsive, and gave him what he wanted without the loss of precious time.

I stowed away that information for future use. I also got the figures (which I later put up to Old Sam) of the saving in small-wheeled Santa Fes for hill-hauling out of our coal-mines. We'd been botching along with older and lighter engines and breaking our trains at the foot of the grades and doubling over, instead of making a straight-away haul. And still another thing I carried back with me and got a pat on the back for was a new grass seed from Holland, a long-rooted grass especially adapted as a soil-binder for our cuts. It may sound trivial enough, but that Dutch grass was a God-send to the old D. and B. where the wind had

once blown the sand-dunes over our rails and the water had once washed our culverts full of silt. We eventually decorated our slopes and cut-banks with living green and at the same time were able to anchor mother-earth where we wanted her anchored.



## CHAPTER VII

IT WAS about this time that Old Sam began to show his first signs of a break-up. People like to say that his great brain had burnt up a body that was too frail for it, but, much as I respected the big boss, I was never able to take that brain-burning business very seriously. I always felt that Sam Callard's troubles were largely due to the foolish way he treated his own stomach. Many a time, in the old days, I've seen him buy a five-cent bag of peanuts and make his lunch of that, munching them as he worked. 'And even after he had a private-car and a *chef* of his own, some strange kink in his make-up kept him to his earlier breakfast-rule of buttermilk and oatmeal, which, I always felt, as I was forced to share the morning meal with him, was not fit fuel to pour into the human engine. Frugality, I suppose, was at the root of it. For with all his astuteness Old Sam, toward the last, developed some strange habits of saving. He was always hoarding string, string of any kind or size, string from a gunny-sack or string from a store-parcel, tucking it away in his pigeonholes and his vest pockets until he couldn't pull out a watch or a trainmaster's report without trailing with it a mouse-nest of soiled cord-loops. He would have

stopped a train, I think, to pick up a ball of twine along his right-of-way. He got a bit queer, too, in the matter of saving paper. Instead of using letter-heads or department pads he'd carefully cut open old envelopes and store them in a pile for inscribing his notations on. He could never be persuaded that the time he lost in this was worth a great deal more than the paper he saved. He'd even dig down into my waste-paper basket and go back to his office happy with a handful of used envelopes, protesting as he went that times were hard and the boys must learn to economize.

It was childish, of course, and it depressed me more and more to realize that the big boss was getting snow on his head-light. But, as Old Sam's health grew worse and his always withered body withered up until it looked a good deal like a mummy's, I learned not to resent his little peccadillos. He was still shrewd enough in the bigger movements of our system and he was taking me more and more into his confidence as we fought for our place in the sun. When the specialist from Chicago diagnosed his case as one of pernicious anemia and put him to bed I was instructed to make a daily report to the patient. The road still came first. He understood everything we told him. But we could see him drying up before our very eyes.

It was the day after I gave Old Sam a pint of warm blood out of my own veins that I was officially made general manager of the D. and B. Blood-transfusion was new in those days and the operation was not so

successful as the specialist from Chicago had hoped to see it. And it wasn't so easy as I expected, though I kept that part to myself. A sore-head or two even said I bought my position with that pint of blood. But Old Sam knew better. He even liked me, I know, in his own grim way. And since he had no one of his own to follow after him, he turned to me to see to it that his unfinished work was carried out.

"It's a crusade, man!" he said in his thinned voice, that last day I talked with him. "It's the bigness of the thing that saves you, Rusk, when the little things would break you. Remember that! And link us up, lad, from seaboard to seaboard. That's worth living for, and fighting for, no matter what it costs."

His bony beak of a hand pressed mine. I could feel an odd thrill go up and down my bent spine.

"We'll go from coast to coast!" I said. And I said it with my jaw clamped.

The faded old eyes studied my face. Then the mummy-like head moved slowly up and down.

"You'll do that!" he said with a sigh of contentment.

And those were about the last words that passed between us. Sam Callard died that night, a little after midnight, before I could get to him, when they sent for me. But I've never forgotten that last talk we had together. And as I remember it, strangely enough, I remember another scene in another place, a good many years later. It was the night my own son Newt happened to be up in the offices about our

terminal yards. It was a clear and frosty evening and the yard-lamps shone ruby and emerald and amber through the still air. They shone through a wash of steel-blue dusk cut by an occasional head-light and threaded by an occasional train with windows of serried gold, moving slow, like a snake with golden scales.

Newt stared at it for quite a long time. "Why, there's poetry in that!" the damned pin-head had the presumption to tell me—as though I hadn't made that discovery before he was knee-high to a grasshopper, even though I didn't carry a volume of Ezra Pound around in my pocket!

I was a pretty busy man, during those earlier years of my operating work, and I'm afraid I didn't give as much time to my family as I ought to have done. Aggie was a good wife, and I guess she worked about as hard in building up our home as I did at building up our road. This is the period when some touch of softness should have shown in my make-up, I suppose, for it was about this time my children began to appear on the scene. But those earlier fighting years didn't give me much chance for softness. And when my first-born, Newton, came to us he came after such a hard struggle that we thought we were going to lose his mother. He was fragile, from the first, and worry over him and Aggie seemed to swallow up the joy of having a son and heir. Newt, in fact, gave no signs of being a Rusk. He belonged to the other side of the family. Even as a little tike he had the power of dis-

turbing me by his feebleness and nettling me by his finickiness, just as my oldest girl, Natalie, who came along a year and a half later, annoyed me with her tantrums and temper. Tassie, my youngest girl, was all right, with enough Rusk in her to make her know what she wanted when she wanted it, but I found it hard to forgive her for not being a boy. Tassie and I cleared up that little trouble, however, when the next baby came. For the next was a boy. That was my last son, Kenneth. He was a Rusk from ear to instep, was Kennie, and we took to each other and understood each other from the first crack out of the box. Husky, thick-shouldered, strong-willed, but loyal to his likes and dislikes and loving everything with wheels, Kennie was my first child who taught me the meaning of fatherhood. Before he was two years old he had learned to love a locomotive; and "choo-choo" was the first word he said. Newt took to picture-books and prettiness. But Kennie loved power. I began to feel that I had some one to follow in my steps, to take up the big job when I laid it down.

Aggie used to complain about me being a stranger to my own family, but most of my time and energy had to go to my work. A lot of the time I couldn't even sleep home. And a job that keeps a man on the wing seems to puzzle and pique a woman.

So Aggie did what many another woman has done. She made up a little world of her own, without counting me in it. She went her way, and I went mine. It was a mistake, though I didn't realize it until it was

too late. I can't even quite make out when the switch was turned and we first began heading in different ways. All I know is that we were both a little lonelier than we ought to have been. Aggie had the children, of course, in her younger days. And when they slipped out of her reach she had her Christian Science. That was the Big Hook that came down the line to lift her wrecked hope back on the rails.

Yet it was the children that made the first big difference with Aggie. They seemed to stir in her some first faint craving for position. She wanted the coming generation to better itself. She gave more thought to those things that would move the family up a peg. And when the salary I pulled down grew bigger and bigger she became more and more set on establishing herself in society. That meant nothing to me, of course, for it's not where you come from but where you're going that counts in my world—though Aggie, I noticed, referred less and less to the fact that she'd once lived on a farm. She wanted a better house on a better street. She wanted better clothes and better furniture. And although she'd seen the day when she sat on a three-legged stool and milked a brindled cow she soon grew to feel that people in our position couldn't do themselves justice without a second maid who'd be willing to wear a muslin cap and apron and push a tea-wagon into the parlor when the whist-game was over.

Another thing Aggie wanted, as we moved up in the world, was a summer place. That was a more or

less new movement in American life, in our part of the country, the owning of an auxiliary home somewhere on the water-front, where the family could play and rest and keep cool during the dog-days. I'd encouraged that sort of thing along the D. and B., for it brought us a new brand of traffic, but I'd never thought of it seriously as a personal venture. It wasn't until after the spring when Kenneth, my second son, arrived on the scene that I saw any reason in Aggie's clamor for a cottage at Old Willow Beach, where the more prosperous people of our town were one by one acquiring places. I felt, at first, that it was too far away, and that I'd be seeing my family only every other Sunday. And I didn't like eating in the railway restaurant. But Aggie looked thin and white, that summer, our home water-supply was bad, and when I saw the chance to take over the Moore cottage on a foreclosure sale, I paid my money and bought my place.

After the coming of Kenneth, Aggie and I, I think, understood each other a little better. She had given me a son in my own mold, and I liked the thought of having somebody to carry on for me. And, busy as I was, I made it a point to give a little more time to my family. I still have the old silver watch with the criss-cross lines on its case that helped to cut Kennie's teeth. And I still have the little wooden train of toy cars he used to trail around after him. He took to that train like a duck to water and called it his "puffer-train." It always used to make me feel, when I'd sit

watching him, that he was cut out for a railroad man, that he was going to show himself a chip of the old block. But it wasn't to be.

For God took my Kennie away from me before he was three years old. That was the summer we had the first tie-up on our line. It was also the summer that first brought me into contact with Wat Hosmer, the labor leader who'd been so quietly organizing up and down the road and boasted he'd have me broken before the leaves fell.

Hosmer had his innings all right, that summer, for we had no inkling of the work he'd been doing behind our backs. He'd found his chance and tied us up and we were fighting night and day to break the blockade and get a wheel moving. But the state authorities refused us military protection, the local sheriff was against us, and we had to swallow the bitter pill of seeing freight-cars burned up by men who should have been manning them along the rails. The first gang of strike-breakers we brought in were stoned and the second bunch were shot at from the shed-ends. They may have deserved it, for they didn't even know the signals. But after that I knew there could be no compromise with Wat Hosmer. It was a fight to a finish—and that bull-necked agitator was fearless enough to tell me so to my face. So I took him at his word. I fought him day by day, while our freight rotted and our rails rusted. And God knows how it might have ended. But in the heat and the dust of it all I got the message from Old Willow Beach, the message that my



Kennie had been drowned. He had fallen off the boat-landing at our summer-cottage trying to reach for his little toy train.

It took the fight out of me, like a knife-blade between the ribs. It bowled me over. Then it made me sit up, like a man wakened out of a sleep, and ask myself what all the scheming and planning and fighting was for. It seemed ghost-like and shadowy, all of a sudden, that working and toiling to build something that somebody would some day take away from you. It wasn't easy to keep a stiff upper lip when I got to the Beach and stood face to face with Aggie. She was very white, but she scarcely shed a tear. It was stifling hot weather, with the roof-shingles cracking in the blistering sun and no wind stirring the lake and the shallows spotted with the white bellies of the perch that had died in the warm water. The one thing we wanted was to get away from there, to get Kennie home for his long sleep.

But it wasn't until I got through to Blankton with the little white coffin that I woke up to the fact there was no way of getting home. We hit our own road there, and on that road not a wheel was turning. It was tied up by the strike.

I dug out Fighting Kearney, who was man enough to feel sorry, but said he was helpless. Then I took him around to where Kennie's coffin stood, with his mother beside it, all in black. She seemed as pitiful as the wilted wreaths on the casket. Kearney agreed to go back and talk it over with the committee. They

finally consented to give me a special, an engine and one car behind it, to carry my Kennie home. But they had to get Wat Hosmer's O. K. to that. And Hosmer sent back word that no union man of his would drive an engine that I rode behind. He was so soured and bitter that he couldn't see straight. And that's what I pointed out to the boys when I got them together. They were with me, to a man, but they were afraid of their scalps, for it was labor's first try-out on that system and Hosmer had them buffaloeed into believing he was the only prophet who could lead them out of the wilderness. So they went as far as they dared. They gave me an engine and a day-coach, or at least they let me help myself to one. But they couldn't give me a crew.

So I drove that engine myself. I tugged on a pair of oil-stained overalls, and found a mill fireman to stoke coal for me, and pulled out of Blankton with my own strikers passing a bunch of green-house callallilies in to Aggie and standing with their hats off as we got under way.

That special was the first train to move along our rails in thirteen days. I wasn't giving much thought to that fact, for I had other things to worry about. But a queer thing happened. Up the line, they couldn't quite understand that movement. It meant just one thing, to them, in view of the slogan Hosmer had tried to paste all over our system, the slogan of "Not a wheel moves here!" When the Boulton despatcher saw us coming, as I found out later, he went

to the key and said, "*Strike's broken*" over the wire. For the wheels were moving, and he'd seen 'em. That message ran along the road like wild-fire. And point by point the men came slipping back before Hosmer and his committee could get their announcements out. And once they started they made it a stampede. There were some schedule and seniority wrinkles to iron out, of course, but they'd suffered enough to make them reasonable and we'd lost enough to make us tolerant. But the important point, the unexpected point, was that this special had broken the deadlock. We left Wat Hosmer high and dry, without even knowing we were doing it, and the life-blood of traffic once more moved up and down our line.

But Hosmer wasn't of the breed that takes defeat lightly. He came to me with red in his eye and was human skunk enough to proclaim that it was all a dodge of mine, that I'd fought behind the body of my own dead child.

I was a little worn out with overwork, that week, and my nerves weren't so steady as they ought to have been. But that put the match in the powder-barrel. I could feel something snap at the back of my head as I got up from my swivel chair and rounded the desk. I've always felt that Hosmer didn't expect me to hit him, he stood so bull-like, with the sneer still on his face, as I stepped up to him. But my fist caught him full on the face and he staggered back so heavily that he tore the imitation mahogany guard-rail up from the office floor. He went through it, with a crash. And I was after him before he could get back at me.

I struck him a second time. But he caught at my knees as he fell, or as he turned over on the floor, and we both went down again together. We rolled about there, fighting like two bull-alligators in a swamp. We were no longer reasoning and reasonable human beings. We were just two maddened hulks of hate pounding each other's bodies as we tumbled about and battering each other's faces when we could get clear for a blow. It was foolish, of course. It was worse than foolish, for issues aren't settled that way. Passion solves no problems. You can't pound a respect for your view-point into your enemy's carcass.

But, whatever happened, I at least pounded into Wat Hosmer a respect for my arm-muscles. He was a husky specimen himself and I imagine he'd reaped most of his earlier triumphs through sheer force of physique. And he'd nursed the idea, since I was an office-man, that I was a flabby-fleshed chair-warmer and couldn't resent a slander in the old-fashioned style of the bull-pen. Well, I showed him he was wrong. For I got him down the third time and I guess I would have pretty well ended his career as an organizer if they hadn't swarmed in and pulled me off him as I made him eat those dirty words he'd flung in my face.

He never forgave me. But I've a hunch he never forgot that fight. We were to have it over again, later on, but we were wiser and warier in those later 'days. We learned to fight in an entirely different fashion. It became less primitive, but it remained

none the less passionate. For Hosmer proved an un-reasoning enemy. And when you've an enemy of that kind, I've found, he has got to be eliminated. You've got to get rid of him, the same as you'd get rid of a copperhead that's crawled into your cellar.

## CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS about this time, as I remember it, that the D. and B. began to show a profit. It had taken a long time, but at last the ball was started rolling. A change had come over the Middle West. In a generation, almost, a wilderness had been turned into a dominion of industry. The timber melted away like snow under an April sun, the swamps and sloughs were drained off, the valleys and slopes and plains were taken up and fenced off and checker-boarded into farmlands. Indian trails became roads and roads became highways, and along them appeared hamlets clustering about a church-spire or a false-fronted saloon. The hamlets grew into villages, and the villages expanded into towns, and the towns, here and there, turned into cities, and our feeder lines that tapped them ran thick with the corpuscles of commerce. We began to prosper.

But prosperity brought its new problems. We were too big a system, by this time, to cling to the old family-circle idea. No one man could keep contact with all our officers and employees. I was no longer able to call the yard boys by their first names and ask after the families of a train crew. The easy and offhanded old personal relationship became impossible. And Hosmer, as chairman of the labor organization, was

more and more able to show his hand. The Brotherhood grew stronger, and as it did so was able to demand both better wages and a different method of treatment for its members. Their newer schedules, it is true, bit into our earnings and reduced our income. But I'd been a fireman and engineer myself and while as an official I was compelled to oppose each new exaction I couldn't get rid of a secret sympathy for the man in the overalls. I never opposed the honest worker. What I hated was the walking delegate.

The growth of our system, too, demanded a more rigorous code of discipline. I was averse, at first, to keeping a card index on a man, but the call for record discipline of some sort prompted me to adopt a modified form of the Brown System. This, of course, could not be applied to officers or the personal staffs of operating officers, for they were close enough under my eye to let me know about what per cent. they were functioning. But in every great mass of men there are some either hopelessly incompetent or maliciously destructive, just as there are others not sufficiently responsive to educational effort. And these have to be eliminated. It also seemed more like all-round fairness to have a personal record of an employee, a record which could be consulted and considered before "discipline was assessed." And I made it a rule that discipline letters should be definite. Such a letter had to describe the offense and describe it exactly. One of my minor clashes with Hosmer arose out of an employee being assessed demerits for delaying a passenger

train, the offense being a failure to clear the time of a first-class train, as required by rule. The real cause was poor coal, producing insufficient steam. This, of course, was grossly improper, featuring as it did the employee's phase of the offense and ignoring the element of the company's contributory negligence. We had to watch our step, for the union "mouth-pieces" were trained men and knew not only their rules and their rights but also were conscious enough of the fact that they could force a tie-up if they had a cause substantial enough for a strike-order. And I had a little discipline of my own to absorb. I began to see the wisdom of cutting out the clenched fist and made it an axiom in wage negotiations and discipline disputes never to show temper. For the foxy committee loves to get your goat. They have you at a disadvantage, once they've riled you, about the same as an opposing attorney has a witness on the hip when he can get that witness hot under the collar. I remember once when I forgot myself, because the chairman of the committee of the Trainmen's Organization demanding bigger wages happened to be Andy Gordon, who'd once worked on an engine with me. That, I suppose, prompted me into forgetting my official position. I let anger take hold of me as I turned on the cool-eyed Andy. "Then when, in the name of God," I demanded, "are you going to know when your men are getting enough for their work?"

Andy never flickered an eyelash.

"When our poorest paid conductor, Mr. Rusk, gets



as much as your best paid superintendent," was his answer. And the business-end of that bee lies in the sting that it was partly true or blamed soon about to become partly true. I don't need to point out that under the Chicago Award certain members of a train crew under certain conditions did draw better wages than the road paid its superintendents. And I'm not kicking about it either, no matter if equal pay for the supervisor and the supervised is sound economics or not. But equal chances and equal freedom and equal respect for one's fellows—those strike me as the things that have made American railroading what it is.

We had to have discipline, of course, but I never was a believer in the long-distance, mail-order brand of discipline. And I never was strong for complaints on paper. The organization schedules which insisted on the accused receiving a personal investigation in the presence of a supporting member were fair and sensible agreements. Cutting off an accused man's chance of a comeback never impressed me as coinciding with an American sense of fair play. But once the infraction was established, punishment had to be adequate and had to be certain. The trouble was in establishing the infraction. For instance, I remember a yard conductor, pushing cars up an elevated yard track on the river-bank, failed to send his helper to the farther end of the cut of cars already on that track, to insure against shoving them off at the other end. That oversight was costly. For three cars went over the end and completely out of sight into the river. It was

some time before the loss of the cars was discovered by the yard-master and still longer before the responsibility could be fixed and discipline meted out, in spite of the denials and the protests of the accused. The affair, to me, meant pretty bad railroading. So I stuck to my assessment of twenty demerits, even though a committee fought me tooth and nail for three months. You can't trifle with fundamentals. You're a fool to weaken, when you know you're right.

Old Sam had made me strong for economy; but my passion for discipline, I think, was personal. They tell me it took some odd turns. I always insisted on brief wires. I demanded conciseness in a report. And they used to call me a martinet in the matter of whistling. Now, about the only time a locomotive is vocal is when it talks through its whistle. And when it talks it ought to talk with authority and not slobber steam across the landscape. Let me listen to his blast, a clear-cut second-and-a-half for his short and an equally clear-cut three seconds for his long, properly timed and cut off and timed again, and I'll tell you if there's a proper breed of throttle-puller on the "kettle."

But all that, of course, is minor. And the wider field brought me wider problems. I may have fought for economy, and raised hell when I saw a drip from a water-tank or a stack of ties being hidden in rag-weed, for that meant shiftlessness, and shiftlessness meant waste. I may have stormed at a twister throwing away a lantern and raved at finding a water-barrel only half-full on a wooden trestle, but when I fought

for service and saving I also fought for good will. I wanted loyalty. We didn't make such a parade of the words "Welfare" and "Efficiency" in those earlier days. We didn't father baseball teams and tennis-courts and recreation-centers for our men, nor did we overburden ourselves with statistical details. But personal force and direct personal relationships were made to count. We watched the man with initiative and rewarded the man who was loyal. When I inaugurated the system of naming new towns after our officials, Javan Page sneered at the honor I had passed out to him, protesting that his name was sufficiently established without having it painted on a wooden sign in front of a water-tower flanked by a section-house and a freight-shed. So I promptly changed that name to "Centerville"—and to-day Centerville is a city of sixty thousand souls with a University and a Carnegie Library and seventy miles of paved streets. When I hit on the plan of rewarding our faithful old engineers by naming locomotives after them, and painting that name in gold text on the pilot-sides, Hosmer said it was a cheap trick to make up for cheap pay. But I've seen a "hogger's" wife with tears of pride running down her cheeks during one of our christening ceremonies, and I've seen men work and wait for that gold star until the pepper-and-salt over their ears turned altogether to salt. And I've seen a better spirit creep through the service because the man at the throttle realized the man in the office was ready to crown his faithful work with a crown that could be seen and understood by his

fellows. I remember an agent we had who was so proud of keeping his station-yard spick-and-span that in his off time he went to a near-by lake and brought in a peculiar red-stone gravel for a right-of-way top-dressing. There was no gravel like it, and it stood out like a raspberry stain on a white linen table-cloth. And that was one of the many things Javan Page laughed at, proclaiming the man an "advertiser" and protesting that a prettified yard never added a pound of freight to a road. But it added something else. I watched that man. He was more than a window-dresser, for his love of thoroughness went right to the core. And inside of twelve years I had the satisfaction of seeing him made train-master and superintendent.

Nowadays, of course, conditions are different. Labor has a proprietary interest in its job and that rather complicates the simple old business of firing a man once he falls short of his work. And the politicians have a proprietary interest in your road and that also cramps your style in the wider movements. The only safe game there, I've about concluded, is to yield gracefully in the little things and remain as hard as iron in the big things. They've got to make a showing. So give 'em the trivialities to stick in their hat. That still leaves 'em a chance to strut around to their constituents and show what they're doing for the country. But whatever happens, you've got to give 'em the glad hand. Prune-juice has superseded the raspberry. Jolly along the grandstand critics and nurse along your local forces—that's the slogan of to-day. As I've said

before, a G. M. of the old dispensation considered it the proper thing to rant and cuss and pound the table with a clenched fist. He raved and swore around like a negro mule-driver flinging blasphemy over his long-eared team. But raving can't get you far when there's a Schedule and a Book of Rules to show you're wrong. And even in operating, the old "Missouri way," the fine old way of having a new boss come in and bring his gang with him and throw out as incompetent every former officer of the old régime, is not so fashionable as it used to be. For a job can show a lot of blood when it's murdered. And murder seems to be going out of style.

Only last summer, when labor trouble was leaving us with a shortage of hands for our road-work, I had a sample of the changing spirit of the times. A shipment of eggs for one construction camp went astray and the bohunks in the board-cars promptly went on strike because the cook couldn't give them fried eggs with their bacon. And on another branch another gang went on strike because a tub of "strong" butter got shipped in to them. And what made me open my eyes still wider was the discovery that we'd been feeding those rough-neck navvies ice-cream for every Saturday and Sunday dinner. When I worked an engine in the gravel-pits I've eaten muskrat and rabbit stew, and knocked my dinner over with my own hands before I put it in the pot. And besides taking care of my engine I ran a forge and did enough blacksmithing to keep the work-train cars in repair when Old Sam was

canny enough to see that a pit-forge could do away with many a long tie-up on the road. Those were the days when a work-train engineer could keep his iron-horse in shape for two or three weeks at a stretch, without once sticking its nose into a roundhouse, and a pit-foreman was as ready to work all night as all day. Yet the last time I went up to look at some new gravel-pits my business car happened to be side-tracked beside a gang of tie-tampers. I sat at my car window and looked them over. They made me think of that slow-camera work you sometimes see in the movies. There was one overalled Tarzan in particular who stopped to roll a cigarette and study the landscape. He bit it in two, lit one half, stopped work again, and lit the other half. In less than five minutes he rolled another and leaned on his shovel and smoked and studied the heavens. So I took out my watch and timed him, between shovel-movements. When I recorded him as standing exactly seven minutes without one move to earn his sixty cents an hour I felt curiosity curl up and die on the hot sands of indignation. I put my watch back in my pocket and climbed down from that car and went up to that Tarzan lost in catalepsy.

"What are you paid for?" I demanded as he rolled a languid eye in my direction. And it made me all the hotter to see he didn't even have the energy to answer.

"Do you get your money for star-gazing?" I asked, trying to hold myself in.

He turned completely around, this time, and eyed me up and down.

"Who in hell are you?" he coolly inquired.

"I'm the general manager of this road," I informed him, "and when you take money from it as an honest worker you're a thief!"

Did he wilt at that? Not for a moment. He merely moved to one side and let his shovel fall across a rail.

"Well, you're a mean-looking old rooster," he remarked, "and I'll be damned if I want to work for you!"

And I couldn't even have the satisfaction of firing him, for he quit on the spot. He not only quit on the spot, but he went right over to our rival road and took seventeen men with him, at a time when we were starving for hands and were carrying them free from either coast.

Old Sam, I imagine, would have shot him before he got off the right-of-way. But times have changed since Old Sam's day. Our huskies used to pump a hand-car for hours at a time, without a kick. To-day, bless your soul, every screw-spiker and tie-tamper supplies himself with a motor-car to carry him up and down the line without moving a muscle. They tell us it's economy to give them gasoline, for it both saves time and tends to keep a laborer on the job. But we didn't have those luxuries in the old days. It was by brain and brawn we worked out our problems. And we may not have made a bigger showing, but it seems to me we made bigger men.

I suppose it's only natural for the older generation to keep mouthing the old claim: "There were giants

in those days!" That's about the only way we can still be loyal to our era. We didn't have the finesse of these newer fellows who come out of college with a head full of trigonometry. We weren't so finicky about equated tonnage in train-loading and the decimal digits in ton-mile figuring. But we had the glory of being pioneers. We had rough work to do, and we may have done it in a rough way. But we lived at a time when a man could make his manhood felt in his labor, when a man could take joy in the strength that overcame difficulty, when a man could fight in the open and let the weakling take the count, without wincing.

Don't run away with the idea, though, that we old-timers were only rough and ready bunglers in everything we did. We may not have been strong on differential equations, but when there was need for fine figuring we made our sums come out about right in the end, the same as a blacksmith can lay aside his sledge and take a little open-bladed razor in his brawny hand and shave himself from ear to ear, deliberately and delicately, without a nick of the skin. And we did some close shaving in those earlier days. We couldn't afford to waste. We had to stretch a dollar to cover three times the extent of track that it covered for our big rival. We had to watch our step or Wall Street would get us, just as we had to swallow as we went along or sit down and be swallowed. "Every spoonful of gravel under the ties" was my slogan, and for two inches too much I've fired more foremen than one.



Iron was still cheap, but we reclaimed every pound of scrap, down to the last spike. We never, of course, bought new rails for branch lines, but used the worn rails from the main line, cutting off the "batter" at the ends when too pounded down for a decent joint. I devised a thirty-inch straight-edge with a multiplying indicator pivoted near one end, to show at a glance the low joints due to batter. We cut our own timber for pile-trestles and bents and sills and box-culverts, and I patented a "pile clasper" for dropping over the top of our pointed logs and keeping them from "brooming" under the pound of the "driver." I hit on the "staggering" of joint-bolts, to prevent wheel-flanges cutting the rail-ends free in case of accidental derailments, and among other things they liked to laugh at, at first, but later took more seriously, was my portable head-light for night track-inspection. It was merely a good big electric-lantern with a diffusing reflector that I could stand on the rear platform of my business car, with the beam spread over my road-bed from shoulder to shoulder. That made them call me "Hawk-Eye Rusk" for a while. But it gave me a chance to inspect many a mile of track after night-fall and tossed another five hours into my official day.

These things seemed revolutionary, at the time, but they were just that brand of so-called common sense that is uncommon enough until some one else puts it under our nose. For example, with us as with every other road, a pay-car had always gone lumbering up and down the line to pay out to the men the money

they had earned. Now, it costs money to move and guard and operate a pay-car—but it had always been done. When I broke that system, and inaugurated the simpler plan of paying by check, a howl went up that could be heard from the Susquehanna to the Cheyenne. But it seemed only common sense, once they got used to it. It justified itself and survived.

I can't expect any medals to be pinned on me for what was equal common sense along the other side of the counter. I was making pretty good money, by this time, and I was saving it. I believed in the D. and B., and knew what it was going to grow into. So I quietly picked up every batch of its low-priced common stock that I could get my hands on. I capitalized my knowledge, as any other sensible man would do. And knowing from the inside what our reports were going to be, I speculated in that stock and carried over my earnings and picked up enough shares to feel respectably fortified in my managerial position. For they can cut off a head, in the railway world, about as quick as Robespierre's guillotine got 'em off in the days of the Revolution. And when I knew our right-of-way was going in a certain direction, I invested in land before the sub-divider stepped in to shave the profits.

It was about this time that something happened to fortify me in another line of action.

I don't think I was unduly inflated by any sense of my own moderate success. I knew that I was making money, and I knew that I was making good, and all I asked was to keep on growing as our system grew. I

never claimed to be a climber in a social way. I'm made of too hard a metal to be socially malleable. I still feel a bit of a fool in a dress-suit, though I've reached the stage where I can tell the difference between a sherbet glass and a finger-bowl. For about seventeen years, as I remember it, Aggie did her best to come between me and my alpaca coat—and the comfortable old alpaca won out in the end. It took almost as long to make me discard the good old nightgown for the pesky pajamas that never cover the small of a man's back. My girl, Tassie, it's true, now attends to all my clothes. She orders them new and sees they are kept in shape, and when she decks me out with a scarf-pin that's too nifty for an old roundhouser I quietly pass it over to one of the office boys.

But when the projected reorganization of the board (after we'd absorbed the bankrupt C. M. and T. before the world at large even knew it was on the market) took me to Boston, Aggie was anxious that Mrs. Javan Page should receive us with a friendly hand. Aggie began to sense the fact that New York was going to be our eventual headquarters and like any other woman of ambition she wanted to link up with a social leader or two. Aurelia Page, of course, knew about all the older families in those older cities. And Aggie, coming out of her customary quietness, pegged away at her point until I put my pride in my pocket and went to Javan Page and suggested that my wife would like to call on his wife during our Boston visit.

I watched Javan Page with a shrewd eye as I put

that suggestion to him. He apparently knew that I had power enough to make it more than a suggestion. But he at once sat down and wrote the required letter of introduction. He did so without enthusiasm, on the one hand, but without comment, on the other. Aggie outfitted herself in Detroit and hid away my black alpaca work-coat and we landed in Boston on a raw April day that struck a chill to the marrow and took the joy out of the half-hearted spring sunshine. I was busy with my meetings and conferences and paid little attention to Aggie's discovery that her Detroit togs weren't turning out to be as up-to-date as she'd expected. But when she armed herself with her letter of introduction and called a cab I took enough time off to go with her to the Page home on Beacon Street, wondering why that visit seemed to mean as much to her as my whole merger conference meant to me.

The Page home was a poorer-looking place than we'd expected to see and two peeks at it showed that it needed either a sandblast or a paint-pot. It looked gray and dull and slightly run-down and I wasn't sorry when the Page butler returned with the information that Mrs. Javan Page was not at home.

Aggie seemed to understand better than I did, for her face suddenly lost all its color. I don't think she said six words to me on the ride back to the hotel. But I'd left the letter of introduction and insisted that we could have another try, in a day or two.

I was still too thick-skulled to understand the situa-

tion. I was a busy man, that week, and every ounce of my energy was going to the work of pounding through my merger as I'd planned it. That planning went a trifle further back than some of the old dunderheads about the mahogany table dreamed. Nearly a year before, for instance, when the bank had sent its railway expert west to investigate us, I'd showed that expert three weeks' of the happiest trout-fishing he'd ever had. His camps were outfitted with everything from the best Canadian rye to the best diner *chef* on the road, and he traveled east as mellow as a golden pippin in August. He believed in us and our future—and he said so in his report.

But things weren't going so well, that week, in my own home circle. Aggie's continued quietness began to puzzle me. Then it began to worry me. She wasn't interested in the Back Bay and wouldn't even go over to see the new Public Library. When I finally came back from the board room of the bank, pretty well primed up with my own importance over the way I'd been able to swing things, I found my pale-faced better half pining alone in the hotel room. I was flushed with victory, as the papers put it, but Aggie didn't even seem interested in the news I'd brought back to her. And it was a good two hours before I could get the truth out of her.

She told me then, with a foolishly stricken light in her eyes, that Mrs. Javan Page had snubbed her.

I told her, knowing what I knew, that Mrs. Javan Page would never dare to snub her. Whereupon Ag-

gie explained that the lady's silence, after our letter of introduction had been presented, could be accepted only as a deliberate cut. She didn't want to know us.

I could afford to laugh at that, for I was still feeling pretty sure of myself. But I could neither jolly Aggie along nor change her mind. And that got my Irish up. I decided to take the bull by the horns. I told my wife that I was going straight over to see Aurelia Page and get her stand on the matter.

Aggie tried to stop me. But she couldn't have stopped me any more than she could have stopped Niagara. She looked at me in almost a pitying way as I ordered a cab and started out. Women, as I understood later on, have little battle-fields of their own, where they snipe with fire-arms too small for the male eye.

It didn't smooth my feathers any, when I got to the Page house, to find Miss Vinnie stepping down the steps. She was in riding-togs and a groom was waiting for her at the curb, where a plump black pony was biting at the bark of a chestnut tree. She'd shot up like a bad weed, since I'd seen her last, but I remembered her well enough. When I spoke to her, however, she lifted her pointed chin a little higher in the air, looked me over with a cool green eye, and pursued her way to the fat black pony without so much as a word in return.

I was irritated but I wasn't upset. I was calm enough when I rang the bell and asked for Mrs. Page. The older generation were wiser than the younger. They had less to learn about one's chickens coming

home to roost—in more ways than one. So I wasn't surprised when the blank-eyed butler returned with the information that Mrs. Page would be down in a moment.

But it was a mighty long moment. I amused myself, however, by looking about that room, by inspecting it with a little more interest than I showed in most rooms. It was a gloomier-looking place than I'd expected, with a lot of sullen-looking mulberry drapes and a lot of old walnut that might have come out of the Ark and a lot of banged-up old brass that must have belonged to the harder-fisted of the Pilgrim Fathers. Even the rugs looked faded and neutral, though I could see they had once been genuine Oriental, before the moths and the tea-drinkers of Beacon Hill had got at them. Everything in that room, in fact, looked as if it had come out of the past, the remote but remembered past that somebody was foolishly trying to keep alive a century or two after it had given up the ghost.

And Aurelia Page gave me lots of time to think this over, for after inspecting the room for full twenty minutes and looking at my watch for the fourth time I picked up a volume of Henry James and nearly went crazy trying to find out what his first page of mental tanglefoot meant to a plain-minded man. It was like working out a time-table, to work out one of his sentences. And I was still struggling with one of Mr. James' verbal way-freights traveling on smoke-orders when Aurelia Page came into the room.

She still struck me as rather handsome, in a cold

and thin-blooded way, and I could see a light in her eye that had never been there before. But she fooled me, from the first, for her unruffled quietness of manner had the trick of making me feel more at home than I ought to have been. I felt so at home, in fact, that I didn't stop to do any beating about the bush.

"Your husband," I solemnly explained, "gave my wife a letter of introduction to you."

She closed her eyes on the ghost of a smile. But beyond that, I think, she didn't move.

"Which was altogether unnecessary," she said with a silvery sort of evenness, "as I'd already met both you and your wife."

I found that to be true enough, when I came to think it over, but there was a shadowy sort of contempt in her tone which wasn't exactly to my liking.

"We were hoping you would call on us," I said as I let my glance meet and lock with hers. It wasn't exactly a reminder, and it wasn't exactly an ultimatum. But I wanted her to see that that Arctic eye of hers couldn't intimidate me as it probably did the small fry who came to the back door with parcels.

She gave a ghost-like shrug of one thin shoulder as she sank into a chair. She was even able to smile. But it reminded me of winter sunlight on a convent icicle. And as she sat there I don't think the hands on her lap moved once.

"That small-town practise of calling on people doesn't seem to be as sedulously observed in the larger cities," she gently reminded me. And she smiled



again. But I caught the malice buried in those folds of gentleness. It was like an open razor-blade wrapped in gray flannel.

"Do you feel you don't care to call?" I was foolish enough to demand. And I could see her face harden under my hostile eyes. But she both puzzled and disappointed me by breaking into a laugh.

"You funny man!" she said as impersonally as though she were speaking of a double-tailed tree-toad. I could feel a quick tingle of anger go through my body. But I held myself in. I sat and watched her as she crossed the room and placed a tapering finger-tip over the bell-button on the wall.

"Why funny?" I asked as quietly as I was able. And it took an effort, for I was boiling inside like a kettle on a caboose-stove.

She sighed, almost plaintively, as she turned and looked at me from under her prettily wrinkled brows.

"It's funny, of course, because you haven't the slightest inkling of its funniness," she was gracious enough to explain to me. And it was maddening because it was so coolly meditative, that speech of hers.

"You mean you prefer not knowing us?" I said as I got up out of her rickety old Windsor chair where at least six generations of New England snobs must once have rested themselves. I was shaking a little by this time. I was doubling up my fists, without knowing it. And she smiled again as she glanced at my big-knuckled hand knotted together like a prize-fighter's.

"I'd scarcely phrase it quite so naively," she corrected me. But I knew what she was driving at. I got it, like a knife-thrust, right up to the hilt. And I had to stand there for a full moment, to recover some sort of control over myself.

"Of course, you know what this means?" I said at last, doing my best to speak as calmly as she had spoken.

"That's a matter of indifference to me," she said with a smiling unconcern that took all the blood from my face and left me in a cold sweat of indignation. For it was a challenge, and we both knew it.

We stood there, facing each other, like two animals facing each other in the quietness of the jungle. There was nothing more to be said. There was nothing to do. The only thing left, of course, was for me to take up my hat and walk out over the worn rugs and out through the door which the blank-eyed butler had opened for me.

The newsboys were calling out the afternoon papers, with my merger featured on the front page and a two-columned cut of me looking pompous and important above a single-column cut of their great Boston banker. But there was little room for pride in my heart as I pushed through the group of reporters waiting for me in the hotel lobby. It was full of hate, of foolish and bitter hate caused by a foolish and bitter woman.

And the thing that hurt, oddly enough, was that with all her hardness Aurelia Page was a beautiful

woman. I can still remember that face of hers as I stared into it across the shadows of her mulberry-draped library, finely cut and proudly held, sharpened into a diamond-like coldness by the quiet enmity that had taken all the color from her slightly hollowed cheeks. She had been born to the purple, but I couldn't see that it had made her especially happy. All her life, apparently, she had walked proudly between purple ribbons. She was a proud and haughty lady, happy in the circumstances of her birth and her being. But I knew that she wasn't happy in spirit. And while I was never strong for the double-dyed stupidity of fighting against a woman, I intended to see that she didn't become any happier through what she had done to me. She knew what my position was, and she must have had an inkling of my power. Yet she had the courage to cross me. What was more, she had laughed softly and called me "That funny man!"

And when you humble a self-made man, I've found, that man may have a short pedigree but he's got a long memory.

## CHAPTER IX

THE first thing I did, when I got back from Boston, was to have Javan Page "investigated." When you have an enemy it's always rather worth while knowing where the weak links of his life happen to lie. And we all have them.

So I called in Bob Wambaugh, the chief of our Investigation Department, who'd just done some uncommonly clever detective work, in tracing up the source of three carloads of our "scrap" which had been crookedly sold and shipped to Chicago. Wambaugh was a character who'd been first brought to me by my now staunch friend, McMun. He looked sleepy and in-offensive and acted like the feeder out of a comedy vaudeville team. But that was merely a mask behind which he concealed the guile of the serpent and the will of a bulldog. So he quietly set to work, at my bidding, to see what he could "get" on Javan Page.

Wambaugh's work, as a whole, was a disappointment to me. There was very little that was useful to be attached to my friend, the enemy. There were, apparently, no women in his life. He was the thin-blooded type, I concluded, who would never make a misstep in *that* direction. There were no decipherable family-skeletons in his closets and no grave profes-

sional errors in his record. But we discovered that financially the Pages weren't so well-to-do as the world imagined. They were keeping up their pace, but they were doing it rather pantingly. They were putting on a big front, in other words, but there wasn't much behind that front. Aurelia Page apparently insisted on spending her money before it arrived in her hand. She maintained an unquestioned social position, but she was harassed, all the while, by debts which her husband seemed in no hurry to liquidate. Her hope for final relief, as I had already surmised, lay in her father, old Marcus Delane. But Delane, with all his money, had the Yankee genius for fondling a treasury-note until the silk threads wore thin. He didn't believe in giving away a dollar when it could be put out to work.

And almost by accident we discovered a new way in which these dollars were to be put to work. For several years the management of the D. and B. had had its eye on the old Peninsular and Northern. It stood a vital link in our ultimate chain, and eventually we had to absorb it or parallel it. But it was a run-down property, as we well enough knew, a fair-weather line that ambled across our trickiest snow-belt and curled up and went to sleep after every fair-sized winter storm. Snow, in fact, was its worst enemy—and I'd figured out on making that same snow my best friend.

I'd already faced and won my Waterloo in this old campaign of operating forces against ice and snow.

We'd all been trained in a hard school along the D. and B. I'd learned "up front" how severe cold could condense steam, how frozen dope would cause cut journals and give us hot boxes, while the oil in a journal-box itself would freeze, how coal froze in cars, and how ash-pans froze and air-hose froze. Only too often I'd seen ice and snow put our signals out of business. I'd seen switches freeze and rails break and rough going shake engines and cars to pieces. I'd seen our interlocking plant fail at the time it was most needed, and I'd seen office-staffs turned out on the line and pale-faced clerks shoveling drifts to let the stalled switch-engines through.

Only too often I'd seen headquarters watch the weather and "pull off the snow-freights," cutting traffic down to passenger and perishable freight trains and sending everything out double-headed. I've seen ice form over night up to the rail-tops, so that when a locomotive swung down the grade and hit the lower track the old iron horse snake-danced off the road-bed and turned around on its care-free drivers. And in water-protecting clay cuts where our ballast wasn't deep enough I've seen Jack Frost heave the ground and lift the rails twelve and fourteen inches above normal, so that we had to put enough shims under the sister-rails to make them look like a speedway on stilts and we also had to crawl over the line like a tom-cat walking a wire fence. It took time and labor, and it cost money, but the road had to be kept open.

And when balked by blind nature I'd tried to work

out a plan for eluding her. In the first place, I inaugurated a campaign to conserve timber along our cuts, to prevent drifting. Where this was impossible I placed snow-fences and put Bern ditches along the upper cuts. I ordered a study of prevailing winds and weather conditions and in the way offices established miniature intelligence bureaus to phone reports of local conditions and equip us to proffer advice to ports and terminals. When snow was too heavily jammed in the cuts and yards to be removed by "bucking" with our old-fashioned snow-plows we called out the locomotive-cranes with their clam-shell and orange-peel buckets to bite away the packed and impeding drifts.

But I saw one thing coming, one thing that was going to change all this. And that was the rotary snow-plow. With the rotary-plow, I'd figured out, the old Peninsular and Northern could be made almost a continuous performer. It could be redeemed. It was suffering from periodic hardening of the arteries, and I foresaw a cure for its disease. I foresaw what that rotary snow-plow was going to do, just as, later on, I foresaw how the automobile was going to affect our feeder lines and our short-haul traffic. I needed that road and I intended to have it. But I wasn't foolish enough to advertise my intention.

When Javan Page, however, as our chief engineer, had been sent over the line a year before to make a quiet appraisal of the property, he naturally assumed that we as an expanding system had our eye on what remained of that decrepit old Peninsular and North-

ern. And he was now trying to forestall us in that move. He and his father-in-law, I found, had been gathering up every loose share of stock. He was staking every dollar on that impending deal. He was playing silent partner in the game. But Wambaugh got hold of enough of the correspondence to show that our good friend, Javan, wasn't above gypping his associates and double-crossing his confederates, when he saw the chance for a quick rake-off. He was, of course, dolorously in need of money.

I sat back and let him wade in a little deeper. Then when the board met to consider the projected purchase I guess I startled them, all right. For this time I bitterly opposed any such move. I advocated a lease of the physical property and an experimental operation of the line. But that, I claimed, was as far as we dare go.

This, of course, was declined. But it gave me time to lay my ropes, and interview my political friends and influence certain banking interests and force the original holding company into a receivership. This was late in November. I knew, of course, the wintry winds would soon be putting the Peninsular and Northern's time-table to bed for its seasonal sleep. So I seemed reluctant to take over the operation of such a property, as receiver, when the court designated me to do so. I was pointed out as the one man who could save the road. And if Delane stood in any way suspicious of my intentions, he was not in a position to announce it.

We had plenty of snow that winter. And I saw to it that our bankrupt road made a record for itself. I



kept it about as alive as a hibernating bear. It didn't even know it had a circulatory system. Javan Page lost about ten pounds in weight that winter, and when we decoded his private wires to old Delane they made mighty interesting reading. But I let him stew along on the anxious-seat until the mid-February blizzard, for the Chicago papers had got interested in the situation and were beginning to clamor for an investigation. They claimed there were marooned towns up the line without food enough to take care of the women and children until the spring thaw could let freight through. It made good copy, and they worked it to the limit. And that, in turn, led to a Federal Inquiry Board, and I challenged that Board to dispute or refute my claim that the road as it stood was not an operable road. Being an Inquiry Board, they did as I wanted: they came up into the district to do their inquiring. And conditions were just right to make it interesting.

I sent them in on a "special," with Jay Tilford conducting and Dippy Dean up in front. And I'd instructed Jay and Dippy on just what had to happen to them. Those unsuspecting investigators meandered into a snow-field that blocked their line of advance and at the same time deepened behind them. When they went to telegraph back for help the wires were down. It was next day before we got any word of their dilemma—and by this time the big city reporters were coming up to nose out the story. I sent four of them through on the first engine and snow-plow despatched

to dig out the special. That plow, as I anticipated, jumped the track before it could buck half-way through to the marooned Inquiry Board. So we sent another engine and plow and hook through to the relief of the first expedition of relief. They, too, got off the rails. I hadn't intended that, for this was pulling the thing a bit strong. So I blew up, before a circle of wide-eyed reporters, and announced that if I didn't have a crew who could take an engine through I'd take one myself.

I ordered out my plow, and climbed aboard, and off we started. It made a good story, and the wires were already humming with different versions of the little drama. But the drifting was heavier than I'd expected. When my little "goat" was doing its best to buck one of the bigger drifts it suddenly bucked itself off the steel. And there we lay, the third tie-up on the line, with the big boss himself eating crow and sending back for a wrecking-train.

It was too good a story to kill, or to try to kill, even if I wanted it killed. It went over the wires in a dozen different forms, and before our wheels were back on the rails most of North America, I guess, was giving me the laugh. I let 'em laugh, though, for they were laughing a new link into my system. That half-starved Inquiry Board put in a report that made the Peninsular and Northern semaphore-arms blush for shame. The newly organized Stockholders' Protective Committee brought suit against the D. and B. for alleged conspiracy to despoil and injure the Peninsular and Northern Railroad and to defraud its stockhold-

ers. But that was a gesture of despair and nothing more, since it was easily established that the rigors of nature could not be laid at my door. Snow had paralyzed them—and paralyzed men can't fight. They were down and out. And before they could get on their feet we'd formally taken over their property at a court order, at a court valuation to fit the prevailing conditions. They were too weak to resist, and we swallowed them up.

We never found out how much Javan Page and Delane lost in that transaction. But it must have totaled a couple of millions. And the odd part of it was I don't believe Page ever realized just how it had happened. If he did, he was a better actor than I ever gave him credit for. Aurelia Page didn't go to Europe the next summer, as she had counted on doing. She sold her summer cottage at Narragansett, in fact, and came west and rented a cheap bungalow at Old Willow Beach, and went perch fishing in a flat-bottomed punt. It was the same bungalow I'd sold the year after my boy, Kennie, was drowned there.

## CHAPTER X

**I**T DISTURBS me, in looking back over those busy years, to find how little of my time and thought had been going to my children. It wasn't that I wilfully shut myself away from them. It wasn't that they deliberately cut themselves off from my company. But my son and at least one of my daughters, the two beings who should have stood closer to me than anything else in the world, seemed to become fretful shadows who couldn't understand their father any more than I could understand them. They were either always wanting things or always losing things. I think I was impatient of some vague incompetency about them. They couldn't be organized and systematized and held down to any sort of schedule. I nursed the delusion that their mother was managing them, but there were times when I could see that her control over them was a soothing piece of fiction, and little more.

Newton, for some reason, stands a more phantasmal figure than does his sister Natalie. Newt and I, for some reason, never jibed, from the first. Even when he was a child I guess I was too rough in my play with him. He was delicate and fussy, as a youngster, and those were two things I hadn't much patience

with. He was more of a critic than a creator, though he had a will of his own. Even in his teens he acquired the trick of saying cutting things about characters he didn't sympathize with and resorting to a sort of verbal fencing to justify his position. There was a feminine streak in him, though his mother always claimed this stood the evidence of some finer nature. Perhaps so, I want to be fair with my own flesh and blood. I've always been ready to step aside and help poor old Newt over a bit of rough going. Perhaps he'd be a stronger man to-day if he hadn't been helped so much. God knows I wanted him to be strong. But I didn't seem to have much to work with.

Newt was strong for Beauty—which he always seemed to be spelling with a capital B. And my claim is that power always gets you farther than prettiness. There was a time, in fact, when Newt accused me of glorying in his weakness. He got worked up enough to turn on me and say that I deliberately kept him weak and used him as a foil, to show off my own strength. And I even had a sneaking admiration for the boy in that momentary mood of passion. It made him seem more of a man. Yet he liked power, the same as the rest of us. Only, he had to take it second-hand. He liked to sit behind the wheel of a big racing-car some one else had built for him. He liked to run a hydroplane some one else had put together for him. He liked to make a splash with money that some one else had accumulated for him. And, oddly enough, he liked women. He had a peculiar affinity for them and

a peculiar understanding of them. I never had much time in my life for philandering around with females. And I couldn't understand a man, a real he-man, being tangled up with a petticoat and putting his hunger for ladies before his natural hunger for success. Newt couldn't even understand how, if you're going to make the big grade, you've got to save every ounce of steam for the haul. I can still see the wonder in his eye, after we'd established our own parcel express company, when I landed on him like a ton of bricks for shipping a box of books over our rival's line. That was giving traffic to the enemy. It never even occurred to him to be loyal to the Old Man's road. He apparently couldn't see it, even after I'd bluntly pointed out to him that it was the Old Man's road that was buying his bread and butter for him—and also his Chinese prints and champagne. He tried to get even by protesting he wished he'd been born poor, claiming that money didn't mean much to him, anyway. Perhaps it didn't. But he let his mother connive often enough to get a thousand or two out of me for one of those little European excursions of his that were supposed to make Young America strong for culture.

My Natalie was another hard nut to crack. I used to look at her, sometimes, and wonder if she was really the child of my loins. For Natalie had something which didn't come from either her mother or me. She had a fearless and cold-eyed finish that is supposed to belong only to the patricians. She pre-

ferred to draw a curtain over the fact that instead of coming out of a château she came out of a snake-fence state in the Middle West. She always wanted to *be* the Right Thing: but I can't say she was equally anxious to *do* the Right Thing. She could be conscienceless, to gain her own end, but after pulling an especially raw deal on you she could look so much like Newt's statue of *Victory* with wings on that you felt you were rather honored to be the object of even her oblique attention.

Nattie was always a pretty girl. But she was not always an approachable one. She was moody and languid and petulant, and when she was crossed she could be as spiteful as a ball of she-copperhead's. I don't think even her own mother understood her. Newt did, I think, possibly because they belonged to the same generation. I remember once how she'd defended Newt by claiming he was high-strung; and when I barked back: "Yes, high-strung on his mother's apron-strings," she eyed me with a cool scorn that made me feel as though I'd kicked a cripple.

My Nattie's great failing, it seems to me, was that she expected life to give her something for nothing. She wasn't willing to pay as she went. She reminded me of one of those penny weigh-scales we used to keep on our depot platforms, which promised to give your correct weight, tell your fortune, and tinkle out a musical air, all for one cent. Nattie thought life ought to be that way. She demanded a grand opera, a tissue of romance that read like a Chambers novel,

and a weight-slip that said "126 pounds" every time she dropped a coin in the slot. But it was, of course, too good to be true. We older and sadder dogs knew that it promised a darned sight too much to be credible. And we'd learned the grim old paradox that the more you give the more you get.

If I didn't always remember that Nattie was only one generation removed from her mother's three-legged milking stool, I'd explain things by saying she was super-civilized, too highly developed and refined, like some of these doll-like bungalows here in Pasadena that are so monotonously prettified that the only way you can give them distinction is to roughen them up with burned brick-culls embedded in their creamy stucco. I tried being rough with Nattie, often enough, but it never worked. We merely provoked each other. So we developed a sort of fixed indifference, going about our own business in life as remote as a pipe-fish and a pickerel in the same aquarium-tank. It's best for two strong wills not to feed off the same fish-worm.

I was a lonely man in those days. But I didn't take time off to think about it. And I would have kept on being a lonely man if it hadn't been for Tassie, my youngest. Tassie and I rather cottoned to each other. She seemed something more in my own mold. I don't like to say she wasn't as pretty a child as Natalie, but at any rate she was more positive in her coloring. Natalie had a cool pride that was like a Stop-Look-and-Listen sign, an arresting haughti-



ness that you weren't apt to question, as if she had inherited it from a faded family portrait. Tassie, as she emerged from a pussy-willow slip of a girl into a warm-blooded young woman, acquired a quiet radiance that seemed to make her face a sort of love-letter to the whole wide world. And I use that word "warm" advisedly, for warmth was what I always saw and found in my daughter Tacita. Not that she was merely a soft and passive cuddler. For Tassie had the gray eye of shrewdness, the gray eye with tawnier lights in it that went well with the golden-brown of her hair. And for a time, they tell me, she was known to her friends as "Bunty." For with all her warm softness, she was quietly and secretly bold. She could even be a trifle arrogant and on occasions a trifle defiant (often regretting in her youth that she had not been born a boy). To be frank, she bossed me and still bosses me. She takes me in tow like a harbor-tug, and bunts and warps me into my proper berth, showing more force than you'd suspect behind her bow-mattress of smiling unconcern. She takes me in hand, when I'm off duty, and totes me along in her leisured way, the same as a racing-car is towed through city streets when it's geared too high for every-day traffic. For Tassie always tried to help. She never caused me trouble, outside of worrying over just what secret ends she might be driving at when she occasionally let me have my own way. She was the first member of my family to realize how I hated those fussy and dreary little functions of the body,

shaving and changing clothes and buttoning collars and knotting neck-ties and eating course dinners and keeping tired feet off upholstered chairs. She knew those were accidents in a preoccupied man's life and she tried to make them ride as lightly as she could on the shoulders that had bigger burdens to carry. She kept the home-nest habitable. She knew that day by day I went out into a world where she would be lost to reason and ground to dust. She didn't herself see the light. But she saw the face that saw the light—and that was enough for her. She believed in her dad.

There was a time when I thought that she was like the other girls of this laughing and chattering younger generation, like them in at least one thing. I thought that she was without romance, that she'd curl her misty red lip over such old-fashioned stuff as sentiment and probably call it "slush" or talk about "slopping over." That didn't seem to fit in with her natural warmth, that veneer of frostiness about the halibut of feeling. But I've come to see, now, that it was nothing more than a protective coating, a little mail-coat to protect her anxious young bosom from affront. I guess if I've any lingering doubt about that I can be put straight by a young man named Wallie Enman. I may not be so quick on my feet as I was ten years ago. But there's nothing much wrong with my visual acuity, as we call it along the line. In other words, my eyesight is still O. K. And I've seen what I've seen—though this isn't the time and place that I'm going to stop to talk about it.

What I want to talk about now is Javan Page, for it was Javan Page who was looming up more in my thoughts than I'd have been willing to acknowledge. He gave me a new incentive to work and a new ambition in life. We were pitted against each other, since that fateful day in Boston, and sooner or later it must be decided who was the bigger man.

Newt, when he was letting off steam once about what he called my "Cæsarism," accused me of hamstringing Lavinia Page's father. He said that I broke the man, smashed him, because he happened to stand in my way. But Javan Page wasn't smashed by anybody. He just died of inanition. He didn't fit, and so he was eradicated. His ancestors may have come over in the *Mayflower* and he may have been a persuasive talker over a cup of tea and a brilliant putter on a golf-green. But he wasn't strong enough for the railway game as it's played to-day. He didn't stand in my way, because he wasn't big enough. And I didn't put him down. It was the system did that, and saved me the trouble. It was merely that he was eliminated when he couldn't stand up against stronger fighters.

When it was first proposed, after the rope-laying by the Boston crowd, that Page should be given a vice-presidency, I didn't even oppose that suggestion. I advocated it, in fact, though I didn't explain my reasons for doing so. I could foresee, however, about what was going to happen. It wasn't the work that Page craved, it was the position. And a machine that

runs hard and fast hasn't much use for ornaments. They just naturally get shaken off.

When Page stepped into his new office at headquarters he sold his Boston home and moved west, bringing his family with him. He enjoyed his jump in salary and bought a couple of automobiles and had a hand in laying out the new Country Club grounds. I myself had neither the time nor the will for social diversions, so it gave me a bit of a shock when I eventually saw Vinnie Page dropping my boy Newt at our door, on the way home from an afternoon dance at their precious club-house.

When Page complained that he hadn't time to get over his work, unless he had more help, I sent him Al Gillies, the hungriest climber on my staff, a lad I'd been watching and grooming for better things. Page told me, a couple of months later, that Gillies had been a god-send to him. That new secretary waded right into the work, getting hold of a new line every week or so and giving his new chief a little more time for his golf and club and cars. I noticed, not altogether with regret, that Page was sauntering down to his office a little later every morning and leaving a little earlier every afternoon. He even seemed vaguely grateful to me for solving so many of his department problems. When I went a step further and suggested switching a routine burden or two from his shoulders to the head of some other department, he invariably and smilingly agreed to the change.

I rather imagine that first year at our western head

quarters was about the happiest year in Javan Page's career. He had no inkling, of course, of what was eventually going to happen to him, for with all his schooling and all his sophistication he seemed oddly without imagination, without railway imagination. I've a sneaking idea, when I come to look over the situation in cool blood, that it was really his selfishness that kept him blind to the true state of things. The one thing he was living for was Javan Page. And it was only natural, under the circumstances, that his eye should not travel far beyond Javan Page. When he got a telegram, from a Florida friend of his, blithely announcing: "The tarpon are running in Charlot's Inlet," he appropriated a two weeks' leave of absence and flurried southward with his family. He went at a time when every official of our lusty young road was laboring to the limit of his strength. And the discovery that Aurelia Page had condescended to carry our Newton along with her was more of a pleasure to Newton's mother than it was to me. It rather tangled up the issue. I couldn't even explain things to my deluded young offspring. I liked fishing myself. But I never bit off two weeks of it at once. I couldn't afford to. I had other things to think of. And one of the other things was that my son Newt was a good deal like Javan Page. He was always the amateur at life, impatient of the things that loomed up important to me, slightly scornful of the rougher hand that had feathered his nest for him, expressing no gratitude for the years of toil that permitted him to prance off to an

eastern college and acquire an accent that seemed a hot-potato echo of Aurelia Page's. When Newt brought a couple of his lackadaisical fraternity friends west for a shooting trip I was foolish enough to let them go up one of our new branch lines still under construction. There was, of course, no regular schedule for train-service along that branch, but the work-trains handled any traffic they could pick up. Newt, in his own imperious way, decided to move out to the end of the line and back on a Sunday. Being the day of rest for real workers, nothing was moving along that stretch of track. But a material-train was made up and the private car hitched on and Newt's train given right of track to the end of the branch and return. As there was no intermediate telegraph office open, the day being Sunday, no news of the movement of the extra was expected until the return of the train.

But it did not return on Sunday. On Monday morning the terminal office reported no news of the extra. The intermediate office reported the same. That meant every work train on the branch was tied up and three hundred men stood around spitting at their shadows, until I got an inkling of the situation and wired up to send a motor-car out ahead of the wrecking-crew to flag that missing extra. About nightfall, however, the missing extra wandered in. Tim Kelley, its conductor, explained that as he was under orders to stop wherever and as long as the young gentleman wanted, and as the young gentlemen had found some pretty good shooting up between the sta-

tions, he had carried out his instructions. The fact that the whole works were tied up never bothered Newt and his friends. But when Newt got on my system, after that, I made it a point to see that my instructions were more explicit.

Perhaps I oughtn't to be telling these things on Newt. On thinking it over, in cold blood, it even looks to me as though I was belittling my own offspring. But God knows Newt was always willing and ready to belittle his dad. And I guess that must have hurt more than I pretended, for Newt, after all, was my own son. And I wanted to love him. I hungered for just a warm human personal contact with him. Many a time I've had the impulse to put an arm around him and draw him close to me and try to break down that ice-wall of reserve he kept building up between us. But I was afraid of that cool young eye of his and that sharp young tongue that could strike like a rattler gone mad. And by the time Newt had started to college he'd pretty well packed his personality in the refrigerator-car of his own pride. I could see, in a dim sort of way, that he wasn't headed in the right direction. But I seemed without the power to influence him. I suppose I still nursed the foolish belief that if I gave him his head he'd eventually work out his own salvation. I expected to see him get a jolt or two before he learned that even a rich man's son has to keep the ledger of life balanced. But I never expected to see him get off the rails the way he did.

I'd been noticing two things that summer. One was that Newt had been trailing around a good deal with Vinnie Page. Another was that he looked ill and nervous. His mother, in her usual mild and ineffectual way, scolded him for his late hours and his cigarettes, but, busy as I was, I could see that Newt and his inner soul weren't on the best of terms.

It surprised me, however, when he walked into my office one afternoon and waited with unexpected meekness until my secretary had taken his departure. He stood staring out the window until we were alone. Then he came and sat down in the chair at the end of my desk. For once in his life he was ill at ease. He looked so hollow-eyed and blue around the gills that I didn't have the heart to be flippant with him.

"What's the trouble, son?" I asked as I handed him over one of my cigars. I meant that act to be a fraternal one, but Newt looked at the cigar, smelled it, and put it back on the desk-end. He preferred the kind that Sir William used to smoke, the kind that come from Cuba in a sealed glass tube and cost a dollar and forty cents apiece by the hundred. And once, when he asked why I stuck to my cabbage and hemp brand, I told him I didn't happen to have a wealthy father to buy them for me.

"What's the trouble, son?" I managed to repeat, overlooking the offense in connection with the proffered smoke.

"I'm afraid I've made an awful mess of things," he said as his haggard eye met mine.



"Gambling?" I asked, feeling closer to him at that moment than I had for many a day.

"No," he answered, looking down. "It's worse than that!"

"Women?" I suggested.

And he moved his head up and down in assent.

"You haven't married one of 'em?" I promptly inquired. And he didn't even have the spirit to resent my brusqueness.

"That's just the trouble," he cried out with his thin hands clenched together. "I can't!"

"D' you mean you want to?" I demanded.

"Yes," he said as he let his eye meet mine. And the harder look on his face didn't escape me.

"Who is it?" I asked, trying to get over the shock of finding I possessed a son old enough to talk about such a thing as taking a wife.

"I want to marry Lavinia Page," was the little bombshell he tossed into my lap. And I had to sit there for a full minute, trying to digest my shock.

"Does she want to marry you?" I asked as I got around to speech. And my son and heir once more looked down at his sport shoes.

"She won't—after what's happened," he finally acknowledged.

"What have you done?" I inquired, with a ghost of a smile, for what was bad news to him looked rather like the reverse to me.

"I'm being blackmailed." He said it quietly enough. But it took an effort for him to get it out.

"Then suppose we get right down to brass tacks," I retorted in the most matter-of-fact tone I could muster, as I reached for a memo-pad. "Who's the lady?"

Newt sat looking at me for a moment or two with a stare that may have had an infinitesimal fraction of admiration in it. It was the sort of man-to-man look I'd been waiting half a lifetime to see on his face. It was like a window-curtain going up above a wintry sill and showing a room warm with fire-light. But it went down again, that curtain, as soon as the harried lad could collect himself.

"It's a woman called Irma Swickard," he told me in a slightly strangled voice. But the name, at the time, meant nothing to me.

"Then let's have the story," I said as I busied myself making a note on my pad.

There's no use my repeating the story as Newt told it to me. It was, on the whole, merely a slightly amended version of the threadbare old narrative of an empty-headed young weakling and a designing lady of the half-world who'd pulled the wool over his eyes. They'd met at a cabaret and motored out to a road-house. When the car broke down, on the way back, they sat in the moonlight until morning. Newt acknowledged that he'd kissed her. By moonlight, in fact, she must have struck him as pretty wonderful. They usually do—after joy-water and jazz-music and a clinging-vine ride home in the dark. She'd led him on, and, being of a frugal turn of mind, had carefully saved all his letters.

"What kind of letters?" I interrupted at this point.

"I suppose they're the usual kind," he acknowledged as his eye evaded mine. "The kind she knows we wouldn't want read in a court room. And unless I marry her, according to her rotten attorney, they're going to be read."

"Has she or her lawyer mentioned a price?"

"I can buy them back," said Newt as his haggard eye met mine, "for fifty thousand dollars."

I made a note of the amount, doing my best not to look startled.

"Have you ever said anything about this to Aurelia Page?" was my next question.

"I haven't, naturally. But Irma intends to, if I don't come across."

"Are you seeing Irma nowadays?"

"I *have* to see her, as often as I dare, just to hold her off," explained my none too happy Newt.

"And how do you feel about her now?" I asked. "Are you still fond of her?"

"Good God, no!" was Newt's retort. "She's a black-mailer. She's even pulled in a pious old mother who pretends to be heart-broken. Between them they've nearly driven me crazy."

"*They would!*" I ejaculated as I looked at the fragile figure sunk down in the wide-armed chair. Then I turned back to my pad. "Now give me all the details you can about the lady—names and addresses and actual data."

He gave them to me and I took them down as calmly

as though I was taking down the figures of a new freight schedule.

"The fair Irma, of course," I said, as I continued to write, "naturally understands that she's targeting at *me* and not at *you*. I want you to see her and tell her that if you're given more time there's every chance of a settlement. But you'd better not let her know you've been talking to me."

Newt got up from his chair and stood at the desk-end, haggard and almost humbled.

"What can you do about it?" he asked, with a movement that impressed me as one of despair. And I forced a laugh, just to bring his nerve back to him.

"Son," I said, "does this strike you as a pretty black mix-up?"

That question seemed to puzzle him.

"It's awful!" he said as he sat down and slumped back in his chair.

And still again I could afford to laugh, though the boy's face hardened at what he accepted as my heartlessness.

"Well, I'll tell you something, Newt," was my slow and deliberate retort. "This may loom up as a pretty big problem to you. But in my work here I'm facing problems as big as that every day in the week. I know you haven't any too much respect for that work. But we needn't go into that now. Let's just see what an old rough-neck can do in this case. There are a lot of things I could say about you and your actions at the present moment. You've been a fool, in *your* way.

And I guess I've been a fool, in *mine*. But announcing that doesn't get us anywhere. So just pass this over to me and let's see if we can't get your friend Irma to listen to reason. Go back to your playthings, Newt, and don't let this get on your nerves. I'll attend to it."

"But what are you going to do?" asked my son as he started to fumble with the eight-cent cigar he'd so disdainfully put back on my desk.

"Leave that to me," I said as I took the cigar away from him before he could break the wrapper.

## CHAPTER XI

**H**ALF an hour after Newt had left my office I'd located Bob Wambaugh, the head of our Investigation Department. He was down the line looking into the wilful derailment of two grain-cars by an over-playful gang of boys—boys whom I eventually kept out of jail, by the way, on condition that they were all soundly spanked by their respective parents. But when I got back to the office that night Bob was waiting for me.

He listened without a word as I told him the entire story of Newt's entanglement. He merely gave a shrug, when I'd finished, as though to imply, "Boys will be boys." But that, of course, was only Bob's way of letting me down easy.

"We've no record," I went on, "of any Irma Swickard in our gallery. But that doesn't mean much. She's not the type who bothers us in our business. And she may have another name or two up her sleeve. What I want you to do, Bob, is to get on her trail and run her down. I don't care where it takes you. But I want to know what she's been and what she's done. When we get that we'll be able to judge about what her little bunch of letters are worth."

Wambaugh reported to me from time to time, and

his first reports were anything but encouraging. If the Swickard woman was an adventuress she had left no trail of adventures behind her. There was no trace of an arrest or an indictment and no evidence of any evil intent until her unfortunate meeting with Newt. She had once supported herself in New York by selling gloves in a department store. Then she had studied stenography and become the private secretary of a Cuban shipping-agent in Bowling Green. The Cuban in question had wanted to marry her, but, apparently because of his unwelcome attentions, she left his office and went to Boston, where she was cashier in a drug-store. From the drug-store she moved on to a Back Bay home where she acted as companion to a wealthy but eccentric old lady who took her to Europe for a year. There she must have learned a little about the upper world and enjoyed life to the full. But, unfortunately, the old lady died of acute appendicitis, from swallowing a prune-stone which decided, half-way down, to stay with her to the end. And Miss Swickard returned to New York, where all trace of her, for the time being, was lost.

It wasn't until Bob Wambaugh started tracing up the girl's so-called mother that we stumbled on anything of importance. And that lay figure of a parent, we found, had once been the wife of an ambulance-chaser named Baumer. She'd been arrested once for being active in a fraudulent insurance-claim case but was later discharged for lack of evidence. As Ida Giliard she'd also figured in a number of dubious claim-

cases against railways, had worked with a Tenderloin wire-tapper, and had even been involved in a jewel-robbery where she'd used a girl named Mazie LeMarsh as a come-on.

So Wambaugh switched his attention to Mazie, unearthing a picture of her in the files of a Philadelphia evening paper where she was reported as a co-respondent in a pretty unsavory Germantown divorce case. But the important thing was that Mazie and Irma looked enough alike to be twin sisters. They weren't twin sisters, however, for Wambaugh soon found they were one and the same person.

By this time the trail was clearly enough marked to follow the lady across the continent and back. We got five different aliases against her, to say nothing of a husband named Frank Forgan, whom she had cast aside as incompetent but never divorced by due process of law. Bob, under my instructions, eventually dug up Forgan in a Hoboken oyster-bar and through him amplified his earlier accumulation of Irma's activities. And that final story showed that she'd been a pretty busy little bee in the garden of the gullible. It showed, among other things, that the fair Irma had been an unfortunate traveler, for in quite a number of cases where she honored a railway with her presence she later took action against that railway for injuries sustained during transit. Once it was a fall from a wet platform step; another time it was being injured going through to the diner; and still another time it was being thrown against the plate-mirror of a stateroom



door when the driver up front stopped too abruptly at his station. And each time Irma had cost the railway good money.

When I'd checked up on Wambaugh's reports and got my ropes all laid I told Newt to inform his lady-love that I was willing to listen to reason. Newt came back with the news that Miss Swickard would be quite willing to talk things over, but that she preferred I should go to her instead of her coming to me.

That was nice and nervy of her, but it didn't altogether fit in with my plans. So I took a chance and declined to visit the second-class apartment-hotel where she'd so discreetly planted herself. She became equally firm in her decision not to make the first surrender. But she began to sniff the quarry, by this time, and, as I had foreseen, she finally surrendered. She talked to me over the phone, in a wonderfully sad and timorous voice, and made an appointment to come to my office at four the next afternoon.

I had everything ready for her, the next day, but I gave no evidence of that to the visitor herself, for, although she arrived punctually on the hour appointed, I kept her cooling her heels in the outer room for exactly forty-five minutes. A wait like that, I've found, always takes a little of the wind out of their sails. I'd insisted that she should come alone. I'd also suggested the expediency of bringing along her precious little package of letters, though Newt was unable to tell me just how many to expect in that package. Newt, in fact, was too rattled to be of much use to us. He'd

have taken the first boat for South America, I guess, if I'd given him a chance to get away. And hidden away in the auditor's office, fresh from his Hoboken oyster-bar, I had the bleary-eyed Forgan, growing mellow and mellow over a bottle of Kentucky Mountain-Dew.

When I was good and ready for her I sent out for the Swickard woman. I knew when she stepped into my office and I knew when the door closed behind her. But I made it a point to be busy with my papers. I kept her standing in front of my desk for a full two minutes, before I even looked up at her. And when I did look up at her I got the shock of my life.

I'd expected to see a hard-faced young termagant with a frescoed cheek and a roving eye, a wary and worldly-wise virago who might smell of musk but who'd fight like a cornered rat. Yet instead of that, when I looked up, I saw a rather slender-bodied young woman with a pale face and misty hazel eyes with a trace of tears in them. Her tremulous red mouth was trying to smile as she looked down at me. What most impressed me was a beguiling air of softness about her. She seemed anything but a fighter. In fact, she looked like a woman who was already beaten. And I'd actually weakened enough, before I quite knew it, to push a chair over to where she stood.

She kept her eyes on me all the time as she felt for the chair-arm and sat down. I didn't flatter myself that she was afraid of me, but there was a timid light in her eyes that rather puzzled me. I began to feel,

for the first time, that Newt wasn't such a fool as I'd thought him. The woman was attractive. She looked so pensive and passive as she studied me with those wounded-gazelle eyes that I began to feel like a good deal of a bully. I had to take myself in hand and think hard of Forgan. I was too old a fighter to be side-tracked by a pretty face. And I'd my family name to clear.

"I understand my son has been making a fool of himself," I said, wading right in.

"No, it's not Newt," she protested. "It's me!" And that rather took my breath away.

"I agree with you," I managed to proclaim, fixing her with the steeliest stare I could send in her direction. I sat there, waiting for her to say something. But she remained silent. It wasn't until she dug out her handkerchief that I felt it wise to get things moving again.

"What is it you want?" I asked. And I didn't ask it any too gently.

"I want Newt to care for me," she said in a small and sobbing voice. For the second time she took the wind out of my sails.

"D' you mean you want to marry him?" I demanded.

"I don't want him to marry that other woman," answered the wet-eyed lady in the armchair. And, knowing what I knew, I had to acknowledge that she was an uncommonly finished little actress.

"You're so set against it," I reminded her, "you want to fine him fifty thousand dollars for the privilege."

"It's not the money I want," she protested with another of her tearful shrugs. "It's Newt!"

"Are you trying to tell me that you care for him?"

"I have loved him," she answered back. And she said it with such a quiet dignity that I had to remember Wambaugh's official reports in my desk-drawer before I could persuade myself that pious meekness was all a part of the carefully planned game.

"And you still love him?" I asked.

"I don't want him to marry that other woman," she repeated in a sort of tearful stubbornness.

"No more do I!" I echoed, without quite knowing I'd said it. For when I thought of Lavinia Page with her pale green eyes fringed with amber and her exacting hard mouth and her finicky pale fingers that couldn't handle anything heavier than a water-color brush, I began to feel rather sorry for Newt. He seemed to be standing half-way between a wildcat and a water-moccasin.

"Then what's the matter with *you* marrying him?" I suddenly suggested. And I thought, at first, it was my speech that had caused the quick hardening of her curved and tremulous lips.

"Newt says he'll never marry me," was the girl's altogether unlooked-for answer. And for the second time my estimate of Newt's character went up a peg or two.

"Then what are we to do about it?" I asked.

The girl stopped, before answering that question, to dry her eyes.

"He says he wants these letters back," she explained, producing a neatly arranged package tied with blue ribbon.

"Might I look at them?" I ventured.

"They're far too personal for that," was her firm but quiet retort. And for the first time I was able to see the claws beneath the velvet.

"Then what do you intend doing with them?" was my next inquiry.

"That's for you to decide," she announced as she let her gaze meet mine.

"I don't quite follow you," I parried.

"You're a wealthy man," was her answer, "and I'm a poor girl. Through your son I've been hurt and humiliated. I accepted his attentions as honorable. I gave him everything I had to give. I believed in him and thought he was going to—"

"Were you willing to marry him?" I interrupted.

"Yes," she said after a moment's hesitation. "Yes, of course I wanted to marry him."

"*Would* you have married him?" I insisted.

"Yes," she acknowledged.

"And you were free to do so?" I demanded. "You were a girl of good character, with a name clean enough to be linked with that of my son?"

"Of course," was her somewhat indignant response, though her face, as she spoke, was a trifle paler than before. "And a good deal cleaner, now I've come to see things as they are!"

"Then let's get this straight," I went on. "My son

Newt, who seems to want to marry another woman, wrote you those letters which you hold in your hand. They're of such a nature that they could either stop this intended marriage or humiliate him and the other lady if made public. But, for a certain consideration, you're willing to return those letters, hold your peace and retire discreetly from the scene. What is that consideration?"

"Fifty thousand dollars," announced the quiet little thing with a throat like a swan's.

"That's a large sum of money," I objected. And more than ever I noticed the hardening of the misty red mouth in front of me.

"It's the smallest sum I would consider in this case," she coolly proclaimed as she tucked away her handkerchief.

"Are you quite fixed on that?" I exacted.

"Quite!" she announced, without blinking an eye. And for all her pose of quietness I could see a certain anticipatory eagerness creep into her face as I got up from my chair and fell to pacing back and forth across my office-floor.

"Is there no other way of settling this?" I asked as I stopped and faced her.

"I know of none," she said without even looking up.

"And you still demand that fifty thousand?"

"I'm not demanding it," she had the effrontery to explain. "It's you and your son who are demanding something from me." And this time when her gaze met mine, there was steel in it.

"Then may I make one small demand of you?" I said out of the silence that had fallen over us.

"What demand?" she asked as her eye followed my movement where I touched the buzzer-button that sounded the signal for Wambaugh to send Forgan into the room.

I thought I had control of my features, but I must have been mistaken in this. For something in my face brought the swan-necked woman slowly up out of her chair, with her narrowed eyes on mine and her breathing quickening as she stood across the desk from me, staring into my eyes.

"I want you to meet a mutual friend of ours," I announced as I saw Wambaugh swing back the door, for I knew well enough that Bob was ushering the pasty-faced Frank Forgan into the office.

The woman, who had been watching me, let her eyes slue around to the figure that had come to a stop at the edge of the rug. There was, as far as I could see, no change in her expression. She merely stared at that fatal figure for ten or twelve seconds of silence, knowing, of course, exactly what Forgan's presence there meant to her carefully planned *coup*.

But she must have done a good deal of thinking in that ten or twelve seconds. She was even able to laugh as she turned back to my desk, where I already had Wambaugh's report on her well splattered past spread out for her inspection. But there wasn't much mirth in the laugh.

"Send him away," she said in an abstracted and

tired sort of voice, with a head-nod toward her ex-husband. "Gumming the game was about all he was ever good for, anyway!"

"What do you want?" I asked.

"I want to talk to you," was her answer.

"On the contrary," I said as I motioned for Wambaugh to lead off his man, "I've considerable data right here that *I'm* going to hand out to *you*."

"Oh, that stuff!" she cried with a contemptuous quick glance down at my documents in evidence. "What's the use of trotting that old story out at this stage of the game? I'm not a blockhead."

"I agree with you," I acknowledged, trying not to smile.

"And I've sense enough to know when the cards have gone against me," she went on as she sat listlessly down in her chair again. She leaned forward and pushed her package of letters across the end of the desk. I don't think her eyes were even on me as I took the package, untied it, and looked through the letters to make sure I was getting what I expected.

I could see pertness and defiance and frustration on her face as I opened the drawer on my right and dropped the package into it. She was about the color of a calla-lily, by this time, but out of that pallor her eyes shone with an odd sort of light, like that of a cat's in the dark. And the strange part of it was she struck me as being a perversely attractive young woman, a young woman with an incongruous sort of flower-like softness that made me realize Newt wasn't



such an empty-headed rabbit as I'd at first thought him.

"You're rather a clever old boy," she soliloquized aloud as she continued to regard me with an insolently estimative eye.

"Not so old," I objected, feeling a little awkward under that frank stare of hers.

"But hard as nails," she continued with her brooding and rebellious eyes still fixed on me. Al Gillies' head in the doorway at the same time reminded me I had other problems besides talking with pretty women.

"Supposing we get down to hard-pan," I suggested, a trifle tired of her flippancies. She glanced at the Wambaugh report I'd taken up. It surprised me a little to discover that her underlip was trembling. Her clowning, after all, had been merely a bit of play-acting to mask a badly troubled soul. She knew I had her exactly where I wanted her. And she was afraid of me.

"What are you going to do with me?" she finally asked as she got up from her chair and stood close to my shoulder, apparently reading the opening lines of the report in front of me.

I even repeated that question to myself, scarcely conscious of the fact that she had one hand on my shoulder and that she was looking down at me with a new note of pleading in her eyes.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked still again, in a voice so small it seemed little more than a whisper. And she wasn't unconscious of the

fighting power of her softness, of the basic appeal of her pliant and perfumed young body pressed so close to my coat-sleeve.

I didn't answer that question of hers. I didn't need to. For, at that moment, Javan Page came into the office. He stopped short at the tableau that must have been rather a puzzle to him. He even smiled wintrily as Irma Swickard drew away from me. But no further sign of shock escaped him. Page's cool eye, in fact, looked the lady over with approval as he talked for a moment or two on official business. And as he talked I suddenly decided what to do with this same troublesome Irma Swickard. I had a property in hand, and not to use that property was bad economics.

So I got up and formally introduced Javan Page to the luminous-eyed young lady standing before the window. Page was in English golf-clothes, which were not so common in those days, and he announced that he was off for the afternoon. He chatted for a minute or two and then asked, with a slightly mocking sort of gallantry, as the Swickard woman gave evidence of her approaching departure, if he could drop her anywhere on his way up-town.

Her eye met mine. She covered her momentary indecision by solemnly walking over to me and shaking hands. I didn't speak, but she seemed to receive and register a message.

"Thanks, I'll ride with you," she said with an arch smile over her shoulder to Page, a smile that promptly took a little of the starch out of that stiff-necked gen-

tleman. 'And before they went off together, rather gaily, she turned back to thank me for my kindness. Some day, she protested from the doorway, she hoped to repay it.

I didn't quite know what she meant. And she couldn't have quite known what I meant when she studied my face. But through the operation of some vague instinct she must have surmised that I stood not unwilling to see her attach herself to the cold-eyed man in the English golf-clothes. I had the satisfaction, at any rate, of seeing her laughingly link her arm through the other's tweed-clad arm and go out as light-hearted as though she were a child with a new toy and as though Bob Wambaugh didn't stand in the other doorway, with a look of mingled perplexity and disgust on his honest face.

"Does Page know the breed of that bird?" my investigation chief inquired as I folded up his reports.

"Probably not," I acknowledged.

"He may get his fingers blackened if he plays with pitch," ventured the wise man beside my desk.

"That would be a great misfortune," I conceded as I showed Wambaugh the salvaged package of letters and tossed them back into the drawer again. But I wasn't thinking of Newt and I wasn't thinking of his letters. I was thinking more of Aurelia Page and what she and her family had once done to my family. And I had a few fish of my own to fry.

Two days later I had Irma Swickard back in my office again. When she confessed that she was at the end of her rope and needed help I suggested the pos-

sibility of her going on our pay-roll. She looked me over with her estimative eye and asked me what her work would be. I somewhat disappointed her by announcing that I'd begin by using her as a spotter, to check up on our conductors' turn-in of cash fares, but that when she'd established a claim for silence and discretion she'd be moved on to more important work, and probably work more to her liking. Her connection with the road, of course, was to remain an official secret.

"All right," she rather indifferently acceded, after giving my proposal a minute or two of thought. "I'm wise."

It was on her way out that she stepped back to my desk for a moment.

"How about this man Page?" she asked.

"Well, what about him?" I parried.

"He's taken quite a fancy to me," said the misty-eyed lady as her gaze met and locked with mine.

"And how about you?" I inquired.

"That's for you to say," she answered, without a tremor.

But I didn't say. If the lady came to her own conclusions, however, it was no fault of mine. I had work enough running a railroad without playing shepherd-dog to officials who nibble themselves astray the same as the unwatched sheep nibbles itself astray. And I was busy, two minutes later, conferring with Haskins, the head of the First National, on the transfer of our fourteen-million-dollar block of preferred to the Moskowitz-VanVorst Syndicate.

## CHAPTER XII

**I** SOON had bigger movements than the entangling and untangling of petticoats to take up my attention. I'd been grooming my system, as a jockey grooms his horse, to face its big jump to the Atlantic seaboard. From the very beginning, in fact, I'd planned and worked for that movement. I'd nursed my resources and built up my reserves. I'd waited in weakness and advanced when I had the strength to advance and waited again until new power came to hand. By drastic and skilful operating we had been able to show a continuously increasing net income. And instead of cropping our soil we were quietly putting back into it considerably more than we were taking out. We did not rank high on the Stock Exchange. That, indeed, was the one thing I did my best to guard against. For the time was not yet ripe for us to show our power. And I never cared to have my proof of power take the form of a Naval Parade. But we were stronger than either our friends claimed or our enemies surmised.

By keeping our whole gangling system under my eagle eye and by operating in a manner which would have brought a smile to Old Sam Callard in his grave, I was able to push my average trainload of revenue-

freight up to five hundred and twenty-nine tons, an increase of sixty-four tons as compared with the year when we took over the C. M. and T. Our loaded freight-car mileage was increased by  $12\frac{5}{8}$  per cent., and our empty freight-car mileage was decreased by well over 13 per cent. In spite of adverse legislation and labor exactions and increased competition, our average revenue per ton-mile rose as high as 6.88 mills and our average revenue per passenger-mile came to within a mill or two of two cents, a little tidal-wave of triumph sweeping through our home-offices when we'd passed the old New York Central by several mills, for the same year.

But we were like the mountains that looked on Marathon while Marathon looked at the sea. We could go eastward only as far as the Morris & Mid-Eastern. Where we ended there the Morris & Mid-Eastern began, lapping its happy feet in the waters of the Upper Bay where it narrows into the Hudson. It had a tide-water outlet, but this gift of the gods was sternly discounted by its paucity of feeders and a half-way inland terminal that stood as firmly anchored as our own half-way eastern terminal. For we blocked them on the west as inexorably as they blocked us on the east. And when you've an enemy holding you down, you've either got to beat him or be beaten by him.

But we weren't strong enough to swallow the Morris & Mid-Eastern. It would take six or seven years of careful campaigning, as I'd figured it, to build up for anything like that anaconda act, even with luck

still on our side and no crop failure or business depression to retard our natural growth. And many things, unforeseen things, from the hand of Providence or an Inter-State Commerce Commission, can happen in that time. Labor, too, was getting more and more organized and arbitrary and I was none too satisfied with the prospect in general. The investing public, in fact, was with me in that feeling of uneasiness. There was a definite withdrawal of funds from railway enterprises and when the M. & M.-E. ran true to form and reacted to this sentiment I made it a point personally to pick up every loose share that I could get at a sufficiently low figure. I knew what I was working toward, but my aim wasn't selfish and my attention wasn't primarily directed toward the financial phase of a consolidation. It was manifest destiny. It was the spirit of the times crying for amalgamation. What I wanted to see was a linking up of short lines for the betterment of transportation, one unified system under one efficient management and the whole haul from coast to coast going into the coffers of one company. It was not to thwart our bigger rivals and it was not to strangle our smaller ones: it was for the Public Service. It was not for gain and it was not for glory, as I made plain in that pretty well-known speech of mine to the Commission, when it first convened to consider the merger—though it was my own daughter Natalie who read that same speech in the evening paper and when her cool amber eye had got to the end murmured "*Claptrap!*" and marched out of the room with a careless smile on her lips.

I was going to give the history of that merger, step by step, but the sagacious Wallie says to cut it short. It's only of interest, he contends, to the railway world, and the railway world already knows it from A to Z.

Perhaps they do. But when Holston of the M. & M.-E. suggested that I go on their board he had no inkling of the M. & M.-E. stock I owned or controlled. When I was offered the general-managership of his half-moribund eastern road, and promptly declined it, they interpreted my stand as mere loyalty to the old D. & B. And, in a way, it *was* loyalty to my old home road, loyalty to a plan that was bigger and older than my own personal ambition. Instead of going as a commander, I went as a hostage to the M. & M.-E. personnel. There, I knew, I could eventually swing the rest of the board to my way of seeing things. It took a year of carefully guarded home operating to let them finally anchor their hope in me. But our water-level route in the lake region, our fattening feeders and our interchanging record at all gate-way cities, our big Twin-City cut-off and the ironing out of grades and elimination of strangle-curves, our road-bed as clean as a billiard-table, and our rolling-stock that functioned to the last inch of its ability—all these combined to bring light to the doubtful. The American Railway Association had set thirty miles a day as the average distance a freight-car should travel, and most of the roads had trouble in attaining that operating goal. But once I'd broken Ninety-Car Nelson in to my needs, that grim-jawed adjutant of mine ran his record up to



forty-three and then to forty-four and one-half miles per day. We had no competitor who could get more out of a ton of coal. We nursed no sluggards and we had no natural advantages that stood neglected. By expedited service and intensive utilization of equipment, by strenuous solicitation of business, by continued improvement in train-loading and by rigid economies in fuel and wages and maintenance expenses we finally made them sit up and take notice. And that record of earnings and expansion, they knew, was not due to luck. It was due to the activity and ability of a carefully selected corps of workers dominated by the personality of one man, one man both determined on success and willing to render service to the last ounce of his energy.

I happened to be that man. And when the Wall Street group who controlled the M. & M.-E. wanted to share in that success, when they knew a natural enough craving to savor the taste of triumph, I explained to them that they could do so only at a price. They could do so only by merging with my western line and making me over-lord of the new system.

They hesitated to listen to reason, it's true, but when it came to a test vote I held enough stock and proxies to save them from committing commercial suicide. And Old Sam must have smiled once more in his grave, for when I walked out of that board room that looked like a battle-field with its strewn papers and its stale air and its drifting cloud of cigar-smoke, when I walked out of that room into the arms of twenty wait-

ing reporters who crowded around me like wolves around a lamb, the old D. & B. fulfilled its destiny and reached the Atlantic. At one jump it had broken through to the seaboard.

There were details to be worked out, of course, such as a deposit agreement and an equitable exchange of the older shares for the newer and the obtaining of federal sanction for the amalgamation. But that was merely a matter of routine, for the holders of those shares had already registered their approval by their votes and the governmental agency reputed to be supervising the merger had already duly reported: "The tentative consolidation plan of the Commission and the showing made in this proceeding support the conclusion that consolidation of the two properties and corporations here involved so serves the public interest that impediment would be a misfortune." The important part was that the directorate of the M. & M.-E. went away from that meeting with the satisfied feeling that they had absorbed *me*. It was expedient, of course, to let them nurse that illusion. But I knew, in my own soul and behind all the solemnly polite phrasing, that *I* had absorbed *them*. The one gesture of surrender, on the part of the D. & B., was the shift of the controlling offices. It was agreed, with my final reluctant consent, that the headquarters of the merged roads should be in New York. This meant the elimination of the old D. & B. headquarters and a shift of me and my staff to the eastern terminal.

It was a move to which, personally, I could see many

objections. But it permitted the M. & M.-E. directorate to save its face. It gave an impression, which I knew could be only temporary, that the eastern division had swallowed the western. It deluded certain Wall Street financiers into the belief that the tail could swing the dog instead of the dog swinging the tail. But that was as trivial, I foresaw, as the first dispute of a bride and groom over who's going to be boss of the family. It's only nature that the stronger should rule, though gallantry, of course, sometimes allows the weaker a pretense at governing. So I let them have their little parade of triumph. All I wanted was possession. They'd know me better, I remembered, when I'd been with them a little longer.

Up to this time, I must acknowledge, I wasn't much of a figure in either the general railway world or the world at large. I was known to my fellow-workers and my rivals. But my name meant little to the man in the street. And I'd never asked for his attention.

But the M. & M.-E. merger made a difference. I became a Personage. As I've already said, the newspaper boys were waiting for me when I came out of that board room. They followed me and photographed me and harried me with questions while I stared at them with a hard eye and kept my mouth shut. But I realized I had something they wanted. And I guess I enjoyed keeping it away from them. It was a new taste of power to me, the headier kind that comes from front-page stories, display type and line-cuts that make you wonder why a sane woman ever married you.

From that day on, however, I became rather a public character. When I walked into a hotel lobby men would whisper: "That's John Rusk!" When my business car rolled into a station-yard there was usually an interviewer outside the brass railing to ask my views on cigarette-smoking or the prevailing export situation. When I announced that I'd fire Bayne Purvis quicker'n hell could scorch a feather if he had another freight congestion and embargo at our new terminal, the New York papers used that homely phrase in their headlines. They spoke of me as the strong man out of the West.

But if they'd had a little closer look into my family-life they might have wavered about calling me the Cæsar Augustus of the Cinder Pit. For there I still carried the ashes of defeat on my tongue. My son Newt was a failure, idling away the best part of his life, out of touch with me and my work, tangled up with the good-for-nothing daughter of a man I despised and a woman I abhorred. My wife seemed lost in a vapid little world of her own, too preoccupied with the tepid problems of her mental therapy to be interested in the conflicts of my grosser world, even protesting that she was too tired to take up the responsibility for our eastern migration and leaving that matter largely in the hands of our amber-eyed Natalie, who, for once in her life, emerged from her shell of disdain and showed a febrile sort of interest in our new fortunes. It was Natalie, indeed, who piloted the passive family through the devious steps of that migra-

tion. It was Natalie who went on to New York and looked over the field with a coldly calculating eye and decided on the gray-stone Fifth Avenue house which I was fool enough to lease for nineteen years. It was Natalie who made me take the elk-tooth off my watch-chain and insisted that Tassie should be transferred to a Tarrytown boarding-school and was equally firm on a butler and a second footman and a chauffeur for the town-car which she personally selected from among the more expensive of the new foreign makes. And it was Natalie who led in a queer-looking woman claiming to be an interior decorator and turning out to be a pastel-loving nincompoop who made our new home look more like a modiste's salon than a place to eat and sleep and be comfortable in. Natalie's smile was one of quiet scorn when I complained about the strangeness of those new surroundings. She silenced me by saying she knew about such things, and I didn't. So I let her go her own way. I was a busy man, and home, after all, had never meant a great deal to me.

But there was, to me, something always lacking about that gray-stone house on the avenue. I missed the old brown leather Morris-chair where I used to smoke and read my paper. I missed the old golden oak dining-room set that Aggie and I had picked out right in the Grand Rapids factory where it had been made. I missed the old black walnut hat-rack with the bevel mirror and the stag-horn hooks and the marble-topped table where I used to keep a model of our first D. & B. lake-ferry under a glass dome. The

best I could do was to commandeer the third-floor billiard-room and order out the convertible pool-table and dome-lights and, after taking possession, install around me my road-maps and blue-prints and profile charts and files and books and the telegraph-key connecting me by private wire with the office across the Hudson. And on top of my new bookshelves, in grim defiance of Natalie and the rest of the family, I placed the model of my first lake-ferry and the silver loving-cup the boys of the home office had given me the night of their farewell dinner. Natalie once spoke of that heavily inscribed cup as an atrocity in metal, and it may not have been a thing of beauty to the casual eye. But to me it meant as much as the fillet they used to give one of those old Greek athletes after a struggle that meant a lifetime of preparation. It meant about what a first love-letter means to a woman, or what a baby shoe means to a mother who has seen the foot once wearing it wander off to far and lonely parts of the earth. For when I crossed the Hudson I in some way crossed my Rubicon. Things were never the same again. Some older sense of freedom slipped away from me. I wasn't allowed to put my feet up on a chair. And we no longer had home-made biscuits when company came to dinner. We were Personages. And we had to live up to our parts.

## CHAPTER XIII

**M**EN pride themselves on their power and get swollen up with their own importance, but about half their triumphs are accidents and about half their moves are blind. In 1858 New York State held public meetings protesting against railways carrying freight in competition with the Erie Canal. The standard gage of our roads is fifty-six and one-half inches, and that extra half-inch was due to a mistake in the first locomotive ordered from England. When engines started to burn coal instead of wood train-hands revolted against what they called the change from clean wood to dirty coal, though a capacity train for one of the old wood-burners was twenty-four or twenty-five little cars. The first locomotive built in America was blown up because the escaping steam annoyed its engineer and he proceeded to bolt down the safety-valve. When Stephenson's *Rocket* attained a speed of twenty-nine miles an hour the English press attacked the crazy new method of travel, protesting that people might as well trust themselves to be fired off of one of Congreve's rockets and declaring that railways and their noise would stop hens from laying and cattle from grazing and kill song-birds and game with their smoke and bring ruin and destruction to the world.

That was a long time ago, and cattle still graze in the fields and song-birds still sing in the trees and the lonely stretches of the world are threaded with shimmering steel. We go adventuring on, leaving the croakers in the cut-pools. We pioneer into the unknown, straightening our surveys and correcting our mistakes as we advance, making the grade and giving the laugh to the skeptics and wringing our solemn joy out of the sheer glory of going on. We don't know what we're headed for. We've no inkling of what awaits us at the end of the run. But we've a feeling, in our more lucid moments, that when we face our final lights those terminal lamps will be white.

No one, I think, rejoiced more over the moving of our operating offices than did Javan Page and his wife. Aurelia Page, like her husband, had been merely an exile marking time in the West. She had accommodated herself to the prevailing crudities of life there, it is true, but once all doubts had been settled as to her husband going on to the eastern offices, she was open in her expressions of gratitude at getting away from an environment that dissatisfied her with its rawness. She was as happy as a princess at the end of her banishment. She seemed to lose more than a little of her hardness. She even thanked me for my good offices in seeing that her precious Javan was retained on the staff.

When, looking into her slightly barricaded eyes, I reminded her of one of my old wall-mottoes: "Serve, to Survive!" she glanced quickly up into my face and



her lips hardened at some trace of irony which she must have detected there.

"Is that a threat?" she asked, though she was able to smile as she put the question to me.

"No, it's merely a law of life," was my retort.

"I wish I was sure of that," she said after a moment of silence.

"Why aren't you?" I asked, nettled a trifle by the closeness with which she was studying my face.

"I was thinking of Newton," she had the courage to reply. And she was generous enough to look away when a tinge of color came creeping up over my collar. There was, I knew, a double stab in that allusion to Newt, and I had to marvel at her audacity. But she went on again after a moment or two of silence. "Javan gives his best," she proceeded to assure me, "but he has to do it in his own way." And she quoted something from Nietzsche about everything divine running with light feet.

It was her turn to color a little, at my laugh.

"Then I'm afraid I'm just common clay," I protested, "for I'm as heavy-footed as they make them."

"It hasn't kept you from climbing," she generously reminded me. But the deadly nightshade, I remembered, was a very graceful flower.

"I've done that with my head and not my feet," it was my turn to remind her. And whatever she was about to say in answer to that I never knew. She stopped short, with a shrug, and looked down at the rings on her thin fingers. There was a time, I re-

membered, when any such self-control would have been beyond her.

One of the first things I did, as soon as I was settled in my new office, was to pass out to Al Gillies the promotion he so richly deserved. I took him away from Javan Page and shifted him to the operating department. I had expected a protest from Page, knowing that Gillies had shouldered a good two-thirds of his chief's work. But no complaint came from Aurelia Page's husband. I noticed, however, that for the next few weeks he returned night by night to his office. I waited, to see how long this little scurry of activity would survive. And my guess came true when his trivial bonfire of desperation burned itself out and his evenings were spent on the lighter and brighter side of the river. Wambaugh, in fact, brought me in a report that Page had twice been seen in a Broadway restaurant with Irma Swickard. I made no comment on that, but merely tucked it away for future reference.

A few weeks later Aurelia Page herself called me up on the phone.

"Could you dine with us next Friday night?" she asked in the suavest of tones. And it struck me, as I listened to those words, that life was not without its little ironies.

"I'm too busy," was my answer. I said it, I'm afraid, both curtly and promptly. And I suppose I ought to be ashamed to admit it, but I enjoyed saying it. I knew it was the crude act of a half-civilized old

plug-ugly, but I couldn't go against my instincts. Yet I wasn't so swamped with work that I didn't keep turning that invitation over and over in my own mind. It had come too late, of course, like so many of this world's crowns, but it had come. When I got home that night I went up to Aggie's room and passed on the good word to her. She listened with a far-away look in her eye.

"You shouldn't have been rude to Aurelia Page," protested Aggie, from her armchair by the window. Her voice was thick with a slight attack of bronchitis which didn't seem to leave as it ought. Aggie, in fact, had already fallen into the habit of asserting that the East didn't agree with her.

"Chickens usually come home to roost," I retorted with my thoughts going back to a certain raw spring day in Boston when I'd had a crimp put in my pride and suddenly learned that I wasn't as socially acceptable as I'd imagined. And it annoyed me to think that the Page family could usurp so much of my attention. Yet it annoyed me still more to discover that Newt and Vinnie Page had figured together in an automobile accident between Montclair and Morristown, a few days later.

Natalie, I found, shared in my aversion to the Pages. She openly derided Newt for dangling around with what she called pale-faced snobs and proceeded to fashion her life without counting on their friendship. For that girl of mine, I soon realized, was doing a little climbing of her own. I had never thought of

her as a mixer and I imagine her acquaintances derived little from her friendship but a fascinated sense of loss. But circle by circle she seemed to establish connections in that new world of hers. She spent an incredible amount of money on clothes and was manicured and massaged and permanent-waved with the rest of her kind. She joined a dancing club which she soon discarded as rowdy and moved on to a Long Island golf club in which she detected a chance for better contacts. She formed the habit of dodging down to Lakewood for a week-end or to Pinehurst for a tournament and complained that we could never hope to get anywhere unless we had a country place in the Piping Rock district. I found my home invaded by rather flippant-eyed youths who trilled their *r*'s and trailed a cloud of cigarette-smoke around with them. Natalie even toted a lackadaisical Italian count home one night to dinner, who rather startled me out of my antipathy, over the coffee-cups, by explaining that he was an electrical engineer and prophesying that within twenty years more than one-half of our railways would be electrified. But, on the whole, I didn't care much for the young men my Natalie gathered around her. They never seemed to last long, however, and they never seemed greatly attracted to her. She always seemed to stand before them, ice-cold and smooth and glittering, like a freshly frozen pond where they couldn't be sure it was safe to tread. And more than once, when they never dreamed it, I sat watching them, watching them as they tested her ex-

actly as boys test a frozen pool with their experimental brick and stone. Only the interrogative missiles, in this case, were slightly off-colored smartnesses and doubtful jokes. These never seemed to break the sheet-ice of her impersonality even though they seemed to mottle and make ugly the crystal surface of her girlhood. When I spoke to her about the bunch of young idlers she was wasting her time over she merely shrugged a languid shoulder and observed that beggars can't always be choosers. She was building a road of her own, she reminded me, and until she got her survey through it was bound to be rough going. But she wasn't a fool and she wasn't going to be satisfied for ever with fools.

So once more I had to modify my opinion of Natalie. She too was working toward an end of her own and doing so with a will of her own. And once more I had to acknowledge to myself that people can seldom be divided into the all white and the all black, but stand a mixture of good and bad, a muddle of strength and weakness. I was lonely in those days, for all my hard work, with Tassie away at school and my roots not striking so deep in the big new city as I'd expected. So I weakened enough toward Natalie to let her drag me off to sit through a performance of *Tristan and Isolde* at the Metropolitan.

It seemed very foolish to me, though I was too proud to admit it to the intent-eyed Natalie. Those fat men in whiskers may have been singing real music, and that hard-working orchestra may have been

pounding out real harmony, but it wasn't the kind that I could understand. And the story, as I remember it, was about as crazy as the noise that went with it. It told of how Tristan was carrying Isolde to the King of Cornwall to marry the latter, but the lady, who seemed to have had a weakness for Tristan himself, drugs him with a love-potion and they both forget home and mother. But in spite of this she proceeds to marry her long-bearded king and continues to play double by secretly meeting her lover. They are caught in the act, and, as I remember it, Tristan gets a well-deserved sword-blade through his slats and is carried away only to have his lady-friend follow him and see him tear the bandages from his wounds before they both finally die to slow music. It may be a great story but it doesn't get next to me. It may be all right for half-dressed ladies to sigh over, but it's not about the kind of people we'd like to see planted in every county of our country and put on our school boards. And I hate to have to acknowledge it, but when Natalie made me share a box with her and her friends at Carnegie Hall where some sort of Philharmonic was performing, I fell asleep in my chair and dreamed I was trying to lift a wrecked locomotive with a steam-crane that kept turning into a riveting-machine that clapped its hands until I woke up and found the audience applauding the tail-end of a symphony.

It rather puzzled and depressed me, to see half a thousand people wringing joy out of something that left me cold. It made me wonder if I hadn't missed

something out of life. So on the way home I put the question up to my amber-eyed daughter.

"Honest to God, Nattie," I said to the young woman who sat so close to me in the auto-seat and yet seemed so far away, "did that music back there mean anything to you?"

Her laugh was short and slightly touched with bitterness.

"Of course it meant something to me," was her delayed retort.

"How much?" I demanded.

"Just enough to make me ashamed of how little I know," acknowledged Natalie with a note of humility that seemed new to her. "But I'm going to understand the darned stuff before I get through with it, or know the reason why!"

She said it with a sort of fierceness that made me more than ever puzzled.

"What good will it do you?" I asked.

"You wouldn't understand," she retorted after a moment of slightly contemptuous silence. And more than ever I realized the gulf that yawned between that amber-eyed daughter of the younger generation and her rough-neck old dad, who seemed more and more to belong to the past.

I'd been having the same sort of feeling with regard to Newt. He too seemed to live and move in a world strangely his own. I'd seen disturbingly little of him since coming to the Big City and even during our casual contacts I was repeatedly teased by a feeling of

frustration, a feeling that he was deliberately building an eight-rail fence between himself and the rest of his family. There were moods and moments when I even felt a dull ache to shut myself up with that boy of mine and have it out with him, have an honest and straight-from-the-shoulder talk with my own offspring that would break down a little of the ice wall that was growing up between us. But Newt had a way of nipping these impulses in the bud. He had a way of silently reminding people that he was a human being in his own right and that he wished his privacy of life respected. I've even seen him look at me with an eye that was as remote and speculative as the eye of a child studying a circus elephant.

So I was surprised when he appeared unannounced in my private office one afternoon when I was just finishing up giving the vice-president of the United Trainmen a piece of my mind. I let that underling of Wat Hosmer know what I thought of him, in no uncertain language, and what I thought of his master, and what I thought of the new breed of hoppers who wanted to suck the life-blood out of our system. I waited for a minute or two to cool down and get my bearings again. And when I looked up I saw Newt standing there with his narrow face rather colorless, studying me with an intent and plainly hostile eye, yet impressing me as something prematurely ripened, like windfall fruit that softens before it sweetens.

"Well, son, what can I do for you?" I asked. And I suppose I did it with the familiar old smile of condescension showing itself before I could hold it back.



But instead of answering my question Newt asked me one of his own.

"Would you mind telling me why you hate the Pages?" he rather startled me by demanding.

"*You* make up for any failure there," I retorted, nettled by the absurd belligerency of his tone.

"I don't know whether I do or not," he said with an unmistakable curl of the lip. "But there's one thing I do know," he went on with slowly mounting anger. "I know it's a contemptible trick of a contemptible mind to try to fight a man through an unscrupulous woman, to try to cheapen Lavinia Page and her father and her mother by tainting their name with a dirty scandal!"

"I don't quite follow you, son," I said, doing the best I could to hold myself in.

"I mean that you deliberately set that Swickard woman after Javan Page," was his impassioned and unexpected retort. "That woman's been in this office three times in three weeks and she's been acting as a paid tool of yours to smirch a decent man's name!"

"Isn't Javan Page man enough to take care of himself?" I inquired, still making an effort to keep up my parade of indifference.

"That's not the point," was Newt's answer. "It's the kind of man *you* are! You pose as a man of power and let them call you the Napoleon of the new age, but you're willing to hide behind a petticoat and hamstring a man whose family doesn't happen to cater to you. You preach about fair play in business and

about the road to success being paved with cobblestones of consideration, but if a man stands in your way and you can't use him, you blow him up the same as you'd blow up rock."

That got my goat. And I let the unsteady-handed young man confronting me know it.

"I don't like your language," I thundered back at him.

"I didn't expect you to like it," cried Newt, apparently elated at that show of feeling from me. "And what's more, you're going to hear some more of the same language."

It was my own son, I remembered, who stood there talking to the man who had kept him fed and clothed from the hour he had first come wailing into the world. And I made a renewed effort to keep myself under control.

"I don't approve of this," I cried out as I swung back to my desk. But my own hand, I noticed, was shaking as I took up a paper columned with figures that wavered before my eyes.

"I don't give a damn whether you approve of it or not," said Newt in a high-pitched voice which suddenly made me feel sorry for him. "But while I'm here I want to tell you that if you're the man of iron they like to call you the iron's in just one place. And that's where your heart ought to be. You like to stand up and preach about the mere accumulation of money and power meaning nothing when all the time it's the only game you can play and the only game

you ever learned to play. Your own children are only shadows to you. You've shut mother out of your life and you don't even seem to know or care that she's a sick woman and that her only chance of keeping alive is to stay somewhere in a warmer climate. You don't even *see* that she's an invalid, that her body's breaking now as her spirit was broken before. All you think about is railroad. All you dream of is railroad. All you live for is railroad. You aren't even interested enough in your own children to see whether they're living decently or making fools of themselves. You haven't—"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted, realizing that the whole thing had gone far enough. "This may sound pretty persuasive to your soured young soul, son, but who was sufficiently interested in you when you were tangled up with this same tainted and tainting lady yourself? Who got busy and lifted you out of her clutches when you hadn't the manhood to fight your own way out? And how is that going to sound to your precious Page family when the story gets out and your fair Lavinia finds she's only got a second mortgage on you?"

But that didn't hold him as I thought it would. He stood facing me with a forlorn sort of recklessness on his narrow face.

"I don't care how it sounds," he proclaimed, "for I'm going to Lavinia Page and I'm going to tell her the whole thing. Then her father will know what he's got to fight against. I fancy I owe them that much."

"And then what are you going to do?" I asked with a quietness which seemed to take some of the wind out of Newt's sails. He looked tired and frail in the light that streamed in through the high window behind him.

"I'm going to get out of here," he said after a moment of silence.

"Where?" I asked with a coolness which I didn't feel. For the lad, after all, was the son of my loins, blood of my blood and flesh of my flesh.

"I want to go back to Europe," was his somewhat lackadaisical reply.

"What for?" I demanded.

"To work at my art," he said with a return of his earlier hostility.

"Your art?" I barked out, in spite of myself.

"It may not sound so big as running a railway," cried Newt, "but if I can express myself that way I'm the one to be satisfied. I want to get out of here. And I'm going to!"

I made a pretense of turning this over, impersonally and calmly. But my heart was heavy.

"That's just as well," I observed, "remembering your record for the last year or two."

"I can't say you've helped me much," was his unlooked for retort.

"You haven't given me the chance," I reminded him. "I've waited to see you do something more than play around with the flabby wasters you've run with. I've watched you turn that play into work and busy

yourself with piffling little pursuits that never got you anywhere and never could get you anywhere. I kept hoping that somewhere behind all the weakness I'd see a little strength. But I can't put my hand on it. I can't even dig out a promise of it. And you never seemed weaker to me than you do at this moment, standing there and snarling at the hand that fed you."

"That only shows," said Newt with a heavy sort of quietness, "how far we are apart."

He looked oddly frail and friendless to me as he stood there in the paling light, with that isolating smile of contempt on his pallid face. Yet a faint touch of color came into his cheeks as I got slowly up from my chair. I thought, at first, that he had sensed some inkling of the love and sadness that lurked at the core of my unwieldy roughness, that he at last understood something of the strange hunger that was eating at my heart. But he shrank back as I stepped over to him. And when I reached out and put a hand on his shoulder he drew away with a feminine sort of fierceness and twisted aside from my touch.

It was my turn, I imagine, to color up a little, for that hurt me more than I could have made clear to him. So, after a silent moment, I put my hands in my pockets and walked over to the window, where I stood looking down at the never ending parade of North River shipping.

"I guess you're right, Newt," I said over my shoulder, for I didn't want him to see my face work-

ing. "We can't help each other. We've just got to muddle along in our own worlds and work our way out to our own ends. You seem to want to paint pictures or write things; and I want to run a railroad. Your game's not my game, and it calls for a different equipment. So if you think you're going to be happier over in the Old World, why, hop to it. If you want to express yourself through your art, as you put it, it's not for me to stand in your way."

It impressed me as one of life's little mockeries that my son should seem closest to me at the very moment I was delivering myself of that divorcing speech. I waited for him to say something. But he merely took out a cigarette, which he held in his fingers without lighting.

"And I want to make this Page situation a little clearer to you," I continued as I went back to my desk. "You've taken the trouble to tell me more than once that Javan Page is a gentleman. I'm not quite sure what that means, but I'm willing to take your word for it. So if he's a gentleman I guess one of his first aims in life is to live clean and keep his own name unsullied. If he's weakling enough to make himself ridiculous with women of doubtful character, that's something for his family and not mine to correct. Like you, yourself, he has his own salvation to work out—and it's a poor coot who tries to blame his failings on somebody else. Whether I approve of Page or whether I don't approve of him isn't very important in this. But there's one thing I want to tell

you, since you feel your life's linked up with that particular family and since you traveled all the way over here to defend its line-fences. From now on I'm not going to raise a hand against Javan Page. All I ask of him is that he function as an official ought to function. He's probably complained to you about his work being hard, since we came East. Well, I'll see that it doesn't get any harder. In fact, whenever and wherever it is humanly possible, I'm going to try to make it easier for him. That's all I can do. This is a hard game. And if he's unfit he'll be eliminated from it. But it'll be his own hand that puts him out, remember, and not mine!"

Newt stood studying me with cynically discerning eyes. His smile said clearly enough that he didn't quite believe me. He seemed about to say something. But when my chief clerk opened the door for the second time Newt apparently awakened to a suspicion that he was holding up the works. So he withdrew, with a hostile frown at the newcomer who could so deferentially place a sheaf of papers in front of me yet so curtly cut me off from the rest of the world. Time, in that office, was money. But I noticed that Newt, on his way out, stopped in the doorway to light his cigarette. That, of course, was to save his face. It was a gesture of unconcern, without much of an audience to give it thought.

I must have given considerable thought, though, to what had passed between us that afternoon. For when I got home in the evening I went straight up

to Aggie's room where she sat in a *chaise longue* watching the traffic on the avenue, ghost-like in the gathering dusk. She never seemed to tire of watching that traffic.

"Aggie, let's go to a show to-night!" I said as I sat down beside her.

I could feel her tired eyes swing slowly about and rest on me. But I pretended to be looking at a book in front of me. Its title, I noticed, was *The Power of Prayer*.

"I'm too tired, John," was Aggie's slightly delayed answer.

"Your cough seems better," I suggested, wondering why I should always feel like a bull in a china-shop while in that room of Aggie's.

"Yes, it's better," she agreed. But she said it without enthusiasm.

"D' you know what you want, old girl?" I said with all the blitheness I could muster up. "You want a winter down in southern California. You want a climate where you can blacksnake out in the sun for ten hours of the day and pick oranges off the back porch. It'd make you into a new woman."

"Is that what I want?" she echoed.

"Sure it is," I maintained.

"That's what Nattie was saying a week or so ago," answered the woman for whom I'd once ridden a break-neck logging-train down the Michigan hills, to snatch her from the arms of a less strenuous wooer. And it seemed a long, long time ago.



"I've a chance of picking up a peach of a place out in Pasadena," I went blithely on, making the wish father to the thought, so to speak. "And I'm going to have you out there bossing a flower-garden and getting so plump your maid'll have to put your dress on with a shoe-horn. That's what I'm going to do!"

"Can you come too, John?" asked Aggie. And the question was so child-like that I had to laugh a little.

"Not unless you want to see a brand-new railway system go to pot," was my answer. "But I can take you in the car with me as far as the San Francisco Convention and we'll have the ride right across the continent together. And you'll have a private car waiting for you, of course, when you want to come back in the spring. And some day, when you come back across this old continent of ours you may be able to do about all your riding along a John Rusk right-of-way!"

But Aggie didn't seem to be listening to me. She stared out at the traffic and finally took up the book I'd tossed aside and placed it carefully on top of two others that lay on the table at her elbow.

"Well, how about Pasadena?" I jovially reminded her.

"It would be nice," she quietly acknowledged. Then, for the first time, she let her gaze meet mine. And in the depth of her tired eyes I saw a sort of inarticulate ache, like the look in a dog's eyes when he leans his nose across your knee. "I'm—I'm worried about Newt," she said with a hesitating sort of quaver.

"Newt's all right," I assured her.

"But he says he wants to go abroad," she said in little more than a whisper. I could see her underlip quivering.

"That's just what he needs," I maintained. "To get away from the home circle for a while and hump for himself. It'll make a man of him."

"He's my only boy," Newt's mother said in a voice thin with misery. I didn't answer her, for at the moment I happened to be thinking of my lost Kennie.

Aggie looked startled when I took her hand and held it. And instead of going up to my study, that night, to plow through my new annual report statistics and look over an article in *The Railway Age* on "The Advantages of the Unit Office," I stayed down with Aggie and talked about old times and wrote a letter to Tassie and put in a check for a little extra pin-money. . . .

When Newt sailed, three weeks later, I went down to the steamer to see him off. I cut short a talk with the organization's delegates and skipped a directors' meeting in the new Bankers' Building and nearly forgot about handing over Newt's letter-of-credit when I found him leaning on the rail side by side with Lavinia Page and as preoccupied as a penguin. He didn't lock himself up in his cabin at the sight of me, it's true, but he was as coldly formal as though we were mere speaking acquaintances. The Page girl, I noticed, was the last to say good-by to him before we were all sent ashore.

I went back to the office feeling strangely alone in the world. There I took out the merry-noted letter that Tassie had sent me about the unexpected pin-money check. I read it over for the third or fourth time. Then I sat down and wrote her another letter back, trying to make it as merry in tone as her own. But it seemed, when I got through, like the pirouetting of a homesick elephant. So I went to the window that overlooked the North River and stared down at the pageant between me and the smoke-crowned city. The river was a ruffled blue under a clear sky and along that fretted waterway I could see a huge passenger ship with three funnels swinging out from its pier and heading on the heels of Newt's liner for the bay and the Atlantic and other lands and other climes. I could see the ferry-boats threading their way back and forth, and tugs edging along the shore-line, lashed to car-floats, and a rusty American freighter, home-bound, forging high-nosed up out of the mists of the upper bay. I could see a coaster nosing down the narrows and a tanker with its engine-room almost over its rudder forge past a weathered schooner laden to the very water-line with lumber. I could see them come and go, touching the heart with a foolish sadness as they spoke of the far-off ends of man's activity and yet warming the blood with a thought of man's power and man's daring. *And some day, I decided as I looked down at them, the John Rusk system would have to have a fleet of its own ocean-going steamers to pick up the*

*freight that the longer haul would turn into a longer purse.*

And while the thought was still warm I sent for our confidential report on the C. P. R's operation of sea-going vessels and shut out my desolation by a close study of its pages.

## CHAPTER XIV

I WAS a busy man, during the ensuing months of struggle with a still balky board and an under-equipped eastern division, but I at least found time to keep an eye on Javan Page. I first cleared myself of Newt's accusation by calling Irma Swickard into my office and explaining that I had a new assignment for her on my western division, where the news of Wat Hosmer's activities were anything but reassuring. Hosmer, in an open meeting of his Red and I. W. W. adherents had publicly boasted that he was going to nail the hide of John Rusk to the roundhouse door where I still ought to be the wiper I once was. He proclaimed me a bloodless climber who'd made myself a millionaire by denying my workers a living wage. He described me, according to Wambaugh's report, as a road-builder who'd used the bodies of his opponents for cross-ties and oiled his engines with the blood of the unions. And I realized that Wat Hosmer, the one-time freight-handler, had developed into quite a talker.

So I told the Swickard woman that I wanted her to go out and do a little quiet detective work for me. I instructed her to investigate Wat Hosmer. If she could get under his guard, and do her investigating

from the inside, so much the better. But Hosmer, before long, was going to cause trouble to me and my road. And if there was a hole in his armor I wanted to find out about it before the hour of the final show-down.

Irma was an intelligent woman. I didn't need to go into any further explanations. Before the week-end she was on her way West, togged out in her quiet-toned Fifth Avenue clothes and as quietly determined to get Mr. Hosmer's number before the robins flew north again. She intended to get his number, she explained, in more ways than one. And as I looked her over, with that beguiling female softness of hers, with that misty red mouth that could speak so plaintively and could smile so provocatively, I felt that I had an ally who wasn't to be altogether despised.

So along with my other work I didn't fail to give due and proper attention to Javan Page's case. When he complained that because of the inadequacy of his help he found it hard to supervise the maintenance expenditures I relieved him of that task and transferred the duty to a new track superintendent. When he a little later pointed out that he couldn't look after the building of our new western bridges and at the same time oversee the reconstruction of our North River terminal, I eventually lightened his official burden by delegating Bradford of the old D. & B. to look after the bridge-work along his territory. And when Page quarreled with his new office assistants—which he'd never have done, I suppose, if he hadn't been smarting

under a feeling of his own failing powers—he found so much trouble in getting a satisfactory new man that the Board was compelled to shift a further section of his official duties to the third vice-president and his staff.

For, jauntily indifferent as he may have appeared, Javan Page must have slowly awakened to what was happening to him. He seemed happy, at first, at the greater amount of time that was given to him for his motoring and golf and polo-playing out at Westbury and yachting along the sound. But he must eventually have understood what the curtailment of one prerogative after another meant to him. He may not have been a man of vision, but he must have had some vague inkling of what was finally to happen to him. He must have suspected that some day he was to wake up and find himself a mere time-server, a decorative figure with nothing to do in a decorative office no longer essential to the system. It may have been pride, on his part, or it may have been a knowledge of enmities better kept under cover, but Javan Page never openly discussed the situation with me. It was something that went too deep to be bandied about with words.

It was, in fact, Aurelia Page who came to my house one night when I was up in my study, busy at the wire getting the last of Wambaugh's reports on the labor reaction to our new wage-reduction edict. And those reports were anything but assuring. Wat Hosmer had called a second meeting of the western Running

Trades and had proclaimed that the bones of labor were no longer to be picked by the bloated capitalists who denied the working man a right to breathe. And the time had come, he proclaimed, for a show-down.

I heard Natalie's repeated knock on the door, but I didn't answer it. She had swung that door open and stepped into the room before I really knew she was there. I noticed, when I looked up, an odd glitter in her eyes, though she was quiet-voiced enough when she spoke to me.

"Mrs. Page is waiting down-stairs to see you," she coolly announced as I switched off the key.

"Send her up," I said after a moment of thought.

"Don't you think it would be nicer to go down to her?"

I stared around the room with its litter of papers and pamphlets, its charts and maps, its crowded table and its filing-cabinet with the blue drift of cigar-smoke floating about its glazed metal top.

"This ought to be good enough for her," I announced. And Natalie, after another silent survey of my face, seemed to understand my mood. She turned and walked out of the room, with the same odd glint still in her amber-colored eyes.

I threw away my cigar-end and brushed the ashes off my vest. I had an impulse to open the windows and let in a little fresh air and straighten up the disorderly chairs. But on second thought I checked that impulse. It made me think of a prize-fighter trying to scent himself up with an atomizer.



I was stooping over my old D. & B. train-model when Aurelia Page came into the room. I proposed to make my first glance at her a preoccupied one, for I resented the thought, all things considered, of possibly having to shake hands with her.

But she saved me that trouble. She stopped just inside the door, which the footman closed noiselessly behind her, and stood regarding me with a coldly analytical eye. The half-puzzled and half-quizzical frown on her forehead made a small horse-shoe just above her faintly arched eyebrows. She was in dark furs that came close up around her neck, giving her an air of luxury, and making her face look paler than it really was. She stood there, pulling rather nervously at one of her gloves. I noticed, when she'd got it off, the sparkle of the rings on her thin fingers. They too added to the sense of luxury she seemed to carry about with her.

"Don't you think you've pounded us enough?" she startled me by suddenly yet quietly inquiring.

I motioned her into a chair as I sat down. But she preferred to remain standing.

"If I've been pounding you, ma'am," I said as I reached for a match, "I've certainly got a short memory."

She shook her head at that, with what seemed to be both impatience and bitterness.

"On the contrary," she retorted, "your memory is tragically long. You are still refusing to forget things."

"There's so much I can't afford to forget," I explained, "in this business of mine."

If that speech reached her she gave no sign of it. She moved a little farther into the room and came to a stop. The look on her face seemed one of frustration, of annoyance, almost, at the thought that we were merely trifling with side-issues.

"You've pretty well got us with our back to the wall," she said with her repeated wintry smile that would have been pathetic in a face less sophisticated than Aurelia Page's. But I had to acknowledge, as she stood there with her luminous gaze fixed on mine, that she was still a remarkably handsome woman.

"I'm afraid you're attributing more power to me than I could rightly lay claim to," I countered.

"But that's what you love, power!" she meditatively observed.

"Only when it can be translated into service."

"That's not how you are using it with my husband," she cried in a slightly sharpened voice.

"Did he send you here?" I demanded in a voice equally sharp.

Her lip curled at that. She didn't even condescend to answer my question. It was so absurd, apparently, that it should never have been asked.

"Can't we at least be honest with each other?" she cried out with a little hand-movement that seemed as much helplessness as anything else. Then she took a deeper breath and faced me. "Is it going to do you any good, any good in the end, to go on like this?"

"How on like this?" I parried.

"Crushing a man you don't happen to like," she protested with a slight shake in her voice. She wasn't, after all, as cool as she pretended to be. And realizing that, I felt the need of keeping doubly composed.

"I think, all things considered, that I've been remarkably patient with your husband," I reminded her as I struck my match and lighted my cigar. "I've been doing for him about all that conditions here allowed me to do."

"That's not true," she cried, brushing aside the smoke-cloud that eddied slowly before her eyes. She glanced at the nearest window, as though she wanted it opened. But I wasn't in the mood, just then, to run errands for her.

"Wasn't he kept on and brought east with the rest of us?" I demanded. "And in the board records you might possibly find my personal recommendation that he be retained."

She smiled at that, but there wasn't a trace of mirth in it.

"Oh, he was brought along all right," she admitted. "But you brought him along about the same as a head-hunter carries an enemy's skull home on his spear-point."

"Your language may be picturesque," I objected, "but it isn't quite plain to me."

"Then I'll make it plainer," she said with unexpected heat. "I mean that you're making a deliberate and coldly-planned parade of my husband's incompe-

tence. You're resorting to a sort of Chinese torture, by keeping him officially alive until you're in a mood for the final stroke, by prolonging the misery until you've had all the joy out of his failure that you can feed on. You've—"

But I stopped her with a gesture.

"I'm afraid we're not on common ground here," I reminded her, speaking as evenly and impersonally as I was able to. "I'm trying to run a railway system that takes about all the time and brains I can give it. It's a big system, and that means it's a chaotic system, since they have to be chaotic, apparently, because of their very bigness. God knows, I'd like to have it as simple and clean as a chess-board! I'd like to see it as orderly and systematized as a cash-register. But it's not that, ma'am. It's more like a frantic battle-field where we haven't much time to look after our wounded and can't always stop to bury our dead. We've got to go on—or go back, beaten."

"And *you* prefer to go on, at any price," Aurelia Page interrupted as I paused for breath. But I disregarded that interruption.

"Right at this moment a labor agitator called Homer is after me," I continued, "and I've got to fight for my position here tooth and nail. I've got to guard my road from both its inside and its outside enemies. I've got to make good at my job or I'll damn soon see a better man in my place. And I can't make good at it unless every man working with me or working under me can be depended on to do his part. He's

part of the big machine, and the big machine can't function unless each unit functions."

"I know all that," said the woman confronting me, almost curtly.

"Then you must also know," I went on, "that I'm a passive factor in any final judgment as to who makes good and who doesn't. A man's own record shows that. And if Javan Page's record shows that he hasn't been strong enough for his job it's neither just nor reasonable to accuse me of bringing about what his own inefficiency has brought about. And that's the whole matter, in a nutshell."

She made no reply to that. Instead, she stood regarding me with a ruminative eye.

"I wonder," she startled me by asking, "if you ever realize how you are being blackmailed?"

"Blackmailed?" I echoed, slightly resenting the look of commiseration that had crept into her face.

"Yes, blackmailed," she insisted. "You pride yourself on being a practical man, but every day and every hour of your life you're paying tribute to a sentimentalized idea of your own strength, you're making secret concessions to what in your pride you speak of as Vision. But it isn't and can't be Vision, for you haven't any more Vision than one of your big locomotives has. You've made an idol of animal force, and you've sacrificed about everything in life for what you regard as success. But you're not succeeding, John Rusk. And you're not even happy."

"Are you?" I inquired, after a moment of silence.

"Oh, I've something to take its place," she said with a shrug of one shoulder. "I haven't put all my eggs in one basket, you see. And that's what gives me the courage to stand here and talk to you in the way I have been talking. We, on our side, have backgrounds you'd scarcely understand. And if we have friends it's really not so important as the further power to make and hold friends. And whatever we lose, thank God, we've still got that. For all failures aren't grubby and small-minded people. Sometimes they're so much a success in their own little secret way that I really wish old Mr. Barnum had put it the other way round: not 'Nothing succeeds like success' but 'Nothing can fail like success!'"

"It's nice to have your sympathy," I retorted when the full intent of her words had filtered through to my small and grubby mind. "But some years ago I adopted a motto which came from a stronger man than me, Mrs. Page. Napoleon Bonaparte, I believe, once said: 'Never complain and never explain.' You are doing both. I intend to do neither. To do that would only be an advertisement of weakness. I'm too busy a man to philosophize about failure. If you can find consolation in the fact that your husband is of too fine a fiber for the position he tried to fill that makes my next move considerably easier for me. So I can assure you—"

Aurelia Page stepped forward with one hand raised, as though to interrupt me. But I permitted no interruptions.

"I can assure you, ma'am, that the head will not remain much longer on the spear-point, as you have had the delicacy to put it."

She retreated again, with her hands down at her side. Her face was very white.

"I understood that, from the first," she said in a voice so small it seemed a mere whisper.

"Then that pretty well puts an end to this interview," I announced as I got up on my feet. I was a little tired of being bullyragged and bobweasled. I'd had about enough of being told what I was and what I wasn't. There were half a thousand men out on our line waiting to give me battle and I wanted to get back on the wire and find which way the wind blew.

Aurelia Page stiffened a little, at that unmistakable sign of dismissal. But instead of taking her departure, as I'd expected, she stood there still studying me with a narrowed eye.

"Is there anything more you'd like to know?" I asked in my heaviest official voice. But she didn't seem to be giving much thought to my question.

"I was wondering about my girl Vinnie," she said with a tired sort of abstraction. "She happens to be going abroad next week."

"That is interesting," I perfunctorily acknowledged.

"I knew it would be, to you," she agreed as her gaze met mine again. "It will be hard, of course, if she has to go as a poor man's daughter. But it will be considerably harder if she has to go as a disgraced man's daughter."

"Harder for whom?" I asked, not getting her drift.

"For the man she's going to marry," she reminded me. And for the first time the thought of Newt came into my mind. I even remembered that the things Aurelia Page had been telling me were strangely reminiscent of the things Newt himself had once told me. Neither of them had disturbed me much, it's true, but I wanted to understand them. I wanted to get an inkling of what they were driving at. I wondered why, since they could never know the poise of supremacy, they should be so ready to assume a pose of superiority. And in my dilemma my eye happened to wander on to one of my old wall-mottoes, hanging above the model of the first engine I'd ever driven. "Never Underrate Yourself: The World Will Do That For You!"

That stiffened my spirit in some way. I felt surer of myself as I glanced at the eight-foot map of my road with its blood-red main line and its thin red fibers of feeders, with its cities and towns and ports and terminals. That, I remembered, was my work. And work had a way of justifying itself. It loomed bigger than this petty intriguing for favor, this petticoat warfare of weaklings for rewards they'd done mighty little to earn.

"Newt's my son, of course," I said to the woman who seemed to be waiting for me to speak, "but I'm rather tired trying to keep him from making a fool of himself."

I could see the color go up above the dark line of



her furs, but her voice was controlled enough when she spoke again.

“And you’re not interested in his happiness?” she quietly inquired.

“That’s something we’ve all got to work out for ourselves,” was my answer, as I stepped over to the telegraph-key at the far side of the room. . . . I didn’t actually see her when she left the room. But when I knew I was alone I opened the key and called until I got Wambaugh again and asked him in code: “What does the Swickard woman report on Hosmer?” And in due time my key ticked out the somewhat enigmatic but not altogether unsatisfactory answer: “The lady reports him as tub butter simply; waiting to be worked.”

## CHAPTER XV.

I FOUND it impossible to go west with Aggie, as I had counted on doing, for at the last moment I had to cut out the San Francisco Convention and give all my time to marshalling our forces for the coming fight with Hosmer. She went off comfortably enough in a private car, however, though I was kept late at a conference at the Bankers' Club and arrived at the station eight minutes after Aggie's train had pulled out. Natalie was not home for dinner that night and the house seemed depressingly silent and empty. We were a family of five, I remembered. Yet not one of us, I also remembered, was within hailing distance of the other.

So I was surprised when Natalie appeared early for breakfast the next morning. She looked tired, and her face was thoughtful, but I had no idea of what was on her mind.

"I've a chance to go down to Palm Beach with the Lathrops," she suddenly announced.

"Why with the Lathrops?" I asked, arrested by the firm lines about her bony chin.

"Because they're not outsiders," she retorted. "And I don't think I ought to miss it."

I felt a foolish little tug of loneliness at my heart, a tug that I'd not often felt there before.

"We'll be pretty well scattered," I ventured.

"I don't seem to be doing much good here," she said with her slightly embittered smile. "And I can get in down there where I couldn't get in up here."

"In what?" I demanded.

"In with the right sort of people," she said as she reached over and lifted the spoon out of my coffee-cup.

"What sort are they?" I demanded, fighting against my old tendency to be flippant in the face of Nattie's solemnities. But, as usual, it was a losing fight. And I guess my heavy laugh didn't add to her happiness.

"They're the sort who've had money long enough not to smell of it," she announced by way of revenge. And that gave me something to think about.

"You mean it's worth more if your grandfather made it than if you made it yourself?"

I was conscious of my daughter's glacial amber eye surveying my person.

"I suppose it sounds as foolish as Wagner to you," she observed. "And you'd probably find it about as hard to understand, even if they tried to explain it to you."

"You mean they don't even speak my language?"

"It amounts to that," admitted my offspring.

"Well, look here, Nattie," I began, with a hot-box developing on my think-line—

"Please don't call me Nattie," interrupted the haughty young lady with the amber eyes.

"I'll call you what I like," I informed her, "and what's more I'll point out there's two sides to that question. *They* don't speak *my* language, the language of honest workers who haul your cake-eating cinder-snappers around the country in varnished cars. Just supposing I said something to them about 'taking her by the neck' and 'putting her over in the corner' and 'making her pop' and 'plugging her' and 'giving 'em the wind'? How much of that would get through to their triple-plated intelligence? Would they know that 'taking her by the neck' is perfectly good railroad language for making a locomotive pull a heavy drag of rattlers up a hill, or that 'making her pop' means that the diamond-pusher beside the old throttle-puller is keeping hot enough a fire in his engine so that the moment she stops she blows off? And would they understand that 'plugging her' is pretty good and graphic English for closing the engine-throttle with a quick jerk of the left hand while the right hand throws back the reverse-lever—which same doesn't do any more good to an engine-frame and cylinders than getting mad at your own daughter? And when we talk about 'giving 'em the wind' we mean that air has been thrown into the train-line—which same you've also heard often enough as you sat in your cinder-buggy waiting to be pulled out.

"That's living language, language that means something, that paints a picture and keeps alive on lively

tongues. That's good frontier American that makes the dictionary-words wake up and wonder how all the dust got into the house. Why, girl, I remember the day a hungry tallow-pot stepped up to a hash-slinger in one of our old railroad chow-houses and announced that he wanted a battle-ship covered with cinders, a pair of fogged switch-lights, and a string of flats smothered in Canada sweet! And what did that hash-er do? Why, without a quaver he handed out a steak smothered in onions and two fried eggs with bacon fat poured over them and a string of wheat cakes swimming in maple sirup."

My Natalie inspected her father with a far-away eye.

"That's very interesting," she languidly acknowledged, "but I don't see that it has much connection with my proposed visit to Palm Beach."

"Perhaps it hasn't," I retorted, "but I merely mention it, my dear, to remind you that your father and your Palm Beach friends live in two entirely different worlds and that their ideas are about as far apart as the language they use. I'm going out on the road, myself, and I guess you'd be as happy down among the beach-combers as you'd be in this empty house. So hop to it. Tunnel in with the old-timers while the tunneling is good!"

She didn't even thank me. She studied me with the same sort of half-exasperated and half-pitying eye you turn on a small child who openly defies home and mother.

"There's one thing I'm beginning to learn about those old-timers you sneer at," she quietly reminded me. "And that is they've somehow acquired the art of being urbane. They don't face the world as though they'd been weaned on a dill pickle!"

"Well, I'm going to face it as though I'd been hatched out of a cannon-ball," I promptly proclaimed, remembering what lay ahead of me.

"It seems important to you, of course," conceded Natalie. "But I wonder if the world wouldn't go along about the same even if one of its railways stopped running?"

"Would it now?" I flared back. "I'm going out this day to keep our line open, and if it's not kept open it's going to mean considerable to you and the rest of your world. For that line carries in your food to you, your milk and meat and vegetables and flour and fruit, every night rain or shine when you're safely asleep in your downy. It feeds your city and keeps your country alive and carries men on machines of steel to serve you on their bigger machines of steel. And once *it* stops, that life-flow of steel on steel, everything stops. Remember that! What's more, if it stops for any length of time it puts us out of business, for you can check off a loss of about a thousand dollars a minute when a road like ours once gets blocked. But it's up to me and every loyal man under me to see that that road's kept open. And let me tell you something more about that, young lady, about the spirit that operates in this little world of ours: It was

a rotten winter night up on our old D. & B. line and one of our signalmen was alone in his tower. His wife was in bed with double pneumonia, in a frame cottage not more than two hundred yards away from the tower. She'd been there for three or four days and the strain had nearly driven that signalman crazy. But he stuck to his job. He'd only a young girl eight years old, so they'd had to call in a neighbor to help nurse the sick woman. When that sick woman died at eleven o'clock at night the eight-year-old girl was so terrified she broke away from the nurse and ran sobbing with the news to the man up in the tower. When it broke on him, that way, he wasn't strong enough to stand up under it. He keeled over in a dead faint. And two minutes later when the despatcher called him he got no answer. Five minutes later the tower on either side of his had received orders to stop all trains. And while the trainmen were climbing down from the crum-boxes and before that unconscious signalman came to we'd another operator up in his tower working on the wires and letting those trains move on again through the driving sleet and snow. The line had to be kept open. Death and sickness and sorrow—those were accidents to the men who kept the traffic moving. . . . And I've wasted twenty good minutes of my time talking shop to you when I ought to have been heading for the dog-house!"

The flippancy had gone out of my Nattie's face as I stood up.

"Those are the things you ought to have told us more about," she said as she followed me out to the hall and held my overcoat for me. A faint tinge of color came to her face as I turned on her, for it was the first time in all her life, I imagine, that the stately Natalie had held a coat for her father.

"I'll tell 'em some day," I announced as I clapped on my hat, "and then they'll all stand up and call me a wind-jammer!"

I headed west that day, with a none too soothing bunch of wires from the division where Hosmer had been doing his dirty work. I knew what was coming, in a way, but I never knew the sore-heads were as well organized as Hosmer had them. I'd sniffed the trouble that was up-wind, however, from the number of times the service brotherhoods had become dead-locked with the managers' committee, by the sharper note that had crept into disputes over rules and wages, and from the sullen opposition of our men to the rulings of the Railroad Labor Board. Our Central Managers' Conference Committee had the nominal backing of the Department of Justice and I'd even been in touch with Washington urging that the rail board assume jurisdiction without the further waste of time and dignity on self-defeating and futile negotiations. But you can't make workers work by legislation. You can't force twisters and throttle-pullers and diamond-pushers to stick to their job by law. If your yard men, from the big switch-hog down to the youngest number-grabber, are fed on red fire they're not going



to labor for the love of laboring. And Hosmer had been feeding them on the hot stuff, all right.

I was a little late in seeing the storm coming, but I got busy enough, once I knew it couldn't be escaped. For the best way to break a revolution, I've found, is to stop it before it starts. One of the sore points between our road operators and our employees had been my recent liberal use of gasoline-cars both on the highways and on some of our feeder lines. This, of course, did away with the full train-crew demanded by the rules and gave us a chance to run in non-union men and still move short-haul freight with a fighting chance of a profit. So I at once ordered a double amount of auto-trucks, for any rough-neck, I knew, could run a gas-car. Then I found the local organizers had their ropes so well laid that they already had a legal committee duly appointed and a press and lecture committee in the field and a relief committee all ready to handle strike benefits. Unmarried strikers, I found through Wambaugh and his workers, were to be served free meals, cooperative buying had already been arranged for, and children of strikers were to be billeted in the homes of workmen not affected by the walk-out. The newly organized picketing-corps, I found, were made up mostly of strong-arm squads who gave no promise of being easily handled.

So I got busy on my side of the fence. Every big city has agents or padrones whose function it is to supply strike-breakers on short notice. And when our call went out for reserves these agents began marshal-

ling their forces. They were, I must now acknowledge, a sorry lot. Hoboes and lungers and ex-boomers from the West, coke-snuffers from the flop-joints of the eastern slums, bandits and soldiers of fortune out of a job, anarchists and bumper-riding socialists and disgruntled union men who'd "pulled the pin," ex-miners all the way from the bull-pens of Coeur d'Alene and ex-roustabouts from the Mississippi levees and ex-gangsters from the old Eighth Ward and wops who couldn't read the English lettering on a box-car and East Side kikes who knew as little about railway signals as they did about honest labor—they were all gathered together in one piebald mass and drilled and tutored and lectured until they eventually began to realize that a "high-ball" wasn't something to drink and finally understood that to "bend a rail" meant to throw a switch. They were herded together and harangued and crowded into day-coaches and hurried out to the firing-line. Overnight, almost, they were turned into railroad men. I don't need to enlarge on the particular brand of railroad-men they made, for, naturally, you can't plant a tree in the morning and expect to saw planks from it at night. And you can't afford to be too scrupulous when you're fighting an unscrupulous enemy. For in one of his circulars Homer, the ex-freight handler, had already openly declared: "We aim to use any and all tactics that will get the results sought and get them in the quickest way, for we no longer live in the day of the long strike. [The tactics used will be determined only by our power

to make good by their use. No terms made with an employer are final, for nothing will be conceded by those employers except what we have the strength to take and hold."

Hosmer later denied that proclamation and claimed that it had been planted on him by his enemies. But the violence and sabotage that accompanied even the beginning of the strike seemed to discredit his claim. For it was not long before our first shipment of gas-cars went through an open drawbridge. A train of supplies for our strike-breakers was mysteriously mis-sent and finally lost in the shuffle. Another string of reefers, which means refrigerator-cars, was broken into and rifled and good Chicago beef was left to rot along the right-of-way. Switches and engines were tampered with and the lives of our workers and passengers endangered.

*But we kept the line open.* The sabotage continued and the big talk went on, but skeleton trains bristling with armed guards still moved up and down the rails. Hosmer, in the meantime, brass-banded up and down the road accusing me of being the pet dog of the New York Bankers' Combine and charging me with accepting labor as only a commodity to be exploited, and kicked aside when I was through with it. He called me the king-pin of the union-wreckers and the true obstructor of interstate commerce, just as he always stubbornly designated the state troopers stationed to guard our property as "Cossacks." The cry of "Scab" was hurled at our strike-breakers. When a mob

formed about our Nagisaw freight-sheds and began breaking windows I ordered the fire-hose manned and had them swept out of the yards. When they began stoning our train-crews I wired the governor for military protection—and instead of militia we were finally given the promise of an official state investigation.

But in some way or another we kept the line open. We housed and fed those frightened rabbits of strike-breakers, who had to get down and creep along the toe-path on our box-car decks and sometimes hide in the gons and whalebellies and reefers to avoid the shower of scrap that greeted them when they crawled through a station-yard or stopped to freeze a hub where some languid-moving ex-gangster had overlooked putting a little oil in the journal-box. They derailed my business car and burned a signal-tower and won over the shop-men. But we didn't give up. We still kept the line open. We merely fought 'em a little harder, for all warfare, from Grant right back to old Joshua, had taught me that when once in the fight the harder you hit 'em the shorter the campaign.

It was in the midst of this fight that a telegram came to me over our crippled wires. It was from Aurelia Page and it said: "Newt seriously ill of pneumonia in Paris. Some one should go."

It was a shock to me, that message, and it was a second shock to me to realize how helpless I stood. For I was needed there at the front.

So I telegraphed at once to Natalie and while I

waited for an answer from her I arranged through Bassler of our home office to cable a couple of thousand dollars to Newt's Paris bankers.

The wire from Palm Beach was two days late in reaching me. It said: "Couldn't sail in time to do any good one way or other"—which was characteristically candid of Nattie. So I sent a second message down to her: "Go anyway!" And to that she as laconically responded: "Quite impossible!"

But while I stewed in the juice of that frank ingratitude I got a telegram from Bassler stating: "Mrs. Javan Page and her daughter sailed for Paris on Saturday."

I hadn't much time to meditate over that new turn to the situation. It brought me a sense of relief, in a way, but it was relief tinged with humiliation. And when, nine days later, I received a relayed cable stating that Newt had passed his crisis, and was presumptively out of danger, I knew a still stronger sense of relief which was, nevertheless, colored by a still stronger feeling of humiliation.

Wambaugh, in the meantime, was keeping in touch with the Swickard woman and in turn making his daily report to me. They weren't very consoling reports. For, as the days strung along, we had to face the grim fact that our fight was a losing one. The strikers, on the other hand, weren't getting any too much fun out of the situation. The weather, by this time, had turned rough and wintry. There was hunger, I know, in many a home. But Hosmer, to give

the devil his due, had his men well in hand. And he managed to hold his line by proclaiming that the next charge would surely break our morale and win the day. Our last through freight had been wrecked and our road-bed strewn with smoked hams and flour and poultry, to say nothing of other equally precious edibles—all of which were promptly commandeered by the white-faced workers' wives from the nearest town. And a small per cent. of our smaller-salaried operating men, anemic individuals with no love for their superiors except as we represented the source of their salaries, began to betray a certain oblique but disturbing fellow-feeling for the walk-out heroes they were there to oppose.

So when the day still known along the line as Red Sunday arrived we saw that it was expedient to have a couple of wrecking-trains manned and ready for emergencies, wrecking-trains each with our best available engine hooked on to the front and a tool-car with everything in wrecking devices from replacers and differential blocks to spare parts for car-trucks, and the Big Hook folded down snug enough to clear bridges and tunnels-tops, and a cook-car rigged out with rough berths and a kitchen to take care of the workers. The crazy charge that I had these cars crowded with carbineers and sharpshooters was merely a proof of the momentary scum boiling up on that huge pot of hate. Instead of rounding up snipers I was sufficiently busy rounding up doctors and nurses for the hospital-train I held at the lower divisional

headquarters, for I could see that the bad blood which had been brewing was going to break out like a flood-river breaking through its dykes.

And it came, all right. It came with that same Red Sunday, when they began the day by dynamiting our Weeks River bridge. They sent one span crashing down through the river-ice. And in doing so they broke our line. The troopers fired and killed the man who had laid the charge, and a stray bullet brought down a boy who apparently had taken no part in it. But the damage was already done. The line was no longer open, on our side, and the tales of cossack murder that went down the road, growing as they went, were enough to unkennel the waiting dogs of hate.

Yet in all the excitement, when I knew the Weeks River bridge was down, I remained cool-headed enough to wire to our home office to have Javan Page, as chief engineer, sent out at once to the scene of the disaster. A message came back explaining that Mr. Page had left on Friday evening for a five-day rest at Pinehurst.

I sat down and reread that message, for the third time. Then I realized it was time to put the lid on the coffin. I wired a message to headquarters requesting the resignation of Javan Page, to take effect immediately. Then I sent instructions to my chief clerk to prepare and issue the necessary circulars governing the situation. And in doing so I felt a good deal like a Big Hook lifting a battered and useless box-car off our right-of-way. The man didn't even count

any more. What counted was to get the debris out of the way and the wreckage off the tracks.

Then I went back to my field work. I threw twenty armed guards around the Weeks River position and put sixty men to work on the new span. And while they were hoisting and lashing and trussing a temporary bridge over the break, with the snow beating on them as they worked, I got word the strikers were burning the car-barns where I'd been housing almost one-half my "scabs." The strike-breakers still inside those barns resented being burned out on a cold and frosty morning. Just where they got their firearms is one of those mysteries that never get satisfactorily answered. But a pitched battle began there beside the burning car-barns and a good many splotches of red marked the trodden snow. The mob spirit by this time had taken possession of the men and they decided, apparently, to make it a day.

When word got through to me at the broken draw-bridge that they'd sent a string of flats down Nippon Hill slam-banging into two dozen loaded gondolas, and the line was blocked to Detroit, I mounted a track speeder and decided to fight my way through and do something to stop further wanton destruction of good equipment. I had two guards on the motor-car with me, but I wasn't thinking of them there for police-duty. I wanted them more to help me get my car across breaks in case a rail was torn up and to shovel snow if we hit a drift we couldn't bunt through. For by this time the weather was thicker and the drifting was



getting to be something to worry about. We were sniped at, twice, as we went through the nearest town, but I ordered the huskies beside me not to fire back, for the simple reason that there was nothing to fire at. A little later, in fact, a bullet came splintering into the wet woodwork at my feet, without a sign of the coward taking that pot-shot at us. But we sailed on, with the snow plastering against our faces and a cold wind cutting through to our bones and a heavy plume of black beginning to show over the nearing hills where they were letting God knows what go up in smoke.

My two guards tried to stop me from going into the yards, but they might as well have tried to stop a mother going into a burning house to get her baby. For I could see the men straggling about the freight-shed and swarming about the equipment on the side-track. They saw me coming and they stepped to one side of the steel to let me through. It wasn't until I mounted the shed-platform and faced them that they understood who and what they had in their midst. And then they hooted and shouted until I couldn't even make myself heard.

I wasn't afraid of them. I wanted to talk to those men. I wanted to bring them back to reason. I wanted to show them that they couldn't shoot and burn their way through to victory, not if they burned the last box-culvert on the line and shot out the last signal-lamp on the system.

But they wouldn't listen to me. Their minds had been poisoned against the one man who could have

stepped to their help that morning. Thanks to Homer, they hated me. And they soon began to show it. They started off by slinging snow-balls at me. That, of course, only hurt my dignity. But when I heard the vicious rattle of stones and scrap-iron against the freight-shed door directly behind me I began to realize that I wasn't so popular with that band of excited hot-heads as I had hoped to be. And my two guards, whom I knew to be armed, had discreetly melted away in the excitement. Yet it wasn't until I heard a shriller cry of "Kill the dog!" and saw the blue barrel of a pistol in the hand of a man not twenty paces away from me that I woke up to what those human hyenas were capable of doing, probably intended to do.

Life is sweet. And I never did relish the thought of throwing it away. But men, for some absurd reason, will face a hearse-plume before they'll show a white feather. That is, most men, the men worth reckoning with. And that's the spark of glory in the common clay of which we're made. I would never have backed away from that army of upturned faces with hate in every narrowed eye even if I'd been left a free agent. But I wasn't.

And this is the point where Mr. Wallie Enman first entered my long and troubled life. Wallie, who, of course, never did and never will amount to much, was a russet-headed young man from the fringe of the Michigan sand-barrens, a young man with a remarkably blue eye and a will of his own. He happened to be station-agent in that jerk-water town, at

the time, and he was one of the few in the neighborhood who had remained loyal to the administration. And he had the brains to know when the big boss was cornered.

It was at the precise moment that the man with the blue-barreled pistol sent a bullet pinging into the bruised slide-door against which I'd instinctively backed that Wallie Enman put a finger in the pie. That bullet went within eight inches of my head, and went right through the door, and the wonder is that it never shot Wallie, who was behind that door and almost within hand-reach of me. But instead of being shot, he ran the door back on its hang-wheels, jerked me inside, and promptly shut and locked the sliding panel again. It seemed very simple, once it was done.

"Quick," he said, without giving me time to get my breath. "They'll be through there in three minutes. And if they corner you in here they will surely kill you!"

I didn't stop to argue with him. All the evidence, in fact, seemed to stand on his side, for by this time we could hear the bullets going through the woodwork and the blows on the door and the shouts of the crowd as we ran down the full length of the shadowy freight-shed.

"There's a mikado and a rotary plow up the siding here," explained Wallie. "They took it away from a train-crew trying to keep the Pittsdown Branch open this morning. Can you run an engine?"

"I sure can!" I gasped as we slipped out at the back of the station and cut around the cattle-pen.

"Then we can fool 'em," proclaimed Wallie. "There's still steam up in that mikado and we can buck their line and get through before they know their own men aren't aboard. And if they try to block us I'll give them the nozzle as we go!"

I knew what he meant even before I saw our mikado "carrying the white feather" where a thin plume of dry steam escaped from the pop, showing the strikers had worked her hard coming down the branch-line and hadn't even bothered to bank or draw her fires. And I thanked God for that negligence as we climbed aboard.

A rotary-plow, I must explain, has a cutting-wheel about the width of a single track in diameter. It's able to bore through a solid drift twice the height of a man, sucking in the snow and throwing it out through a swivel nozzle three feet in diameter. The man in the rotary look-out can direct this stream to the right or the left of the track, the same as a fireman can direct the stream from his hose-nozzle. And with it he can bury a horse and sleigh fifty feet away.

So I thanked God for Wallie and that rotary as we got under way and rolled out on the main line, gathering speed as we went. They saw us coming as we bucked the accumulated drifts and a wild shout went up from them as they surged toward the track. But Wallie gave them the nozzle. He swung from side to side with a blasting white shower of the beautiful that

left them stunned and gasping and fighting for breath. But we got through.

We got through to the open without so much as a broken pane of glass. There was, of course, no triumph in it. It was a flight, a retreat. It wasn't even heroic, for it failed to achieve any good end except save the scalp of the big boss. But our road still had use for the brains under that same scalp. And when we got through to Weeks River and our own line I called the russet-headed young man down from the look-out and asked him his name. And he told me it was Wallie Enman.

Then I asked him why he'd done just what he did do.

"For the good of the service, sir," he said without a flicker.

I looked him over, as he stood there in the snow, and liked his coolness and the look of that blazing blue eye of his.

"You're all right, Wallie," I said as I shook hands with him. "You say you're agent up there. Well, you strike me as the kind of man we're in need of down at headquarters. So from to-day forward consider yourself attached to my personal staff. And as soon as I get this mess cleared up I'll be able to make that more definite."

"Thank you, sir," said Wallie, as cool as a cucumber, casually inquiring if he could cut in on our wire and send a message back to his boarding-house mistress not to wait Sunday dinner for him but to pack

his things in his old horsehide trunk and send them through as soon as the line was open.

And that's how Wallie and I first bumped together. It's some time back. But it's seldom that I'm mistaken in my man. I guess I've never greatly regretted having Wallie flung at my head that way. And if he's regretted the same he's an ungrateful young hound, for step by step I've made it a point to push that boy ahead wherever and whenever it could be done without interfering with the good of the service. And the strange part of it is that Wallie seems satisfied to hang around. I'm a hard man to work for, but he's been with me ever since. And some day, before they shunt me into the roundhouse, I'm going to find out why. I've got a suspicion or two, at the back of my cynical old bean, but to say it out in cold type wouldn't be fair to either party concerned.

## CHAPTER XVI

**I**T WAS Red Sunday that made me realize things couldn't go on much longer in the way they had been going. We weren't licked. But a little more such warfare would see us bleeding to death. So we had to call a truce.

That move, I knew, would have to be made with discretion. Our enemies had tasted the wine of violence and their ring-leaders were still a little drunk with their fresh and foolish sense of power. But our investigation department, on the other hand, had been keeping a close eye on Wat Hosmer. Notwithstanding the fact that he had a wife and three children in East Detroit I found that Irma Swickard hadn't exaggerated when she'd so curtly reported him as tub butter waiting for the print. And therein lay the weakness of that full-blooded animal whose memory was as short as his morals. Like the rest of the anarchists, he wasn't overly strong for the sanctity of the family tie. And Irma was an uncommonly appealing and an uncommonly clever woman.

Hosmer thought, all the time, that he was acting well under cover. But we weren't ignorant of each and every move he made. He surveyed the open field

and thought himself impregnable. He stood, apparently, a commander behind unshaken walls. He talked big of his victory, without dreaming of the sappers who'd been at work, without a suspicion of the mine that lay under him where he stood.

When, through the Federated Committee chairman we suggested a conference with Hosmer and his committee, our enemy sent back word that it was through him and not his committee that this issue would be settled. When I conceded a point and agreed to meet him in personal conference he promptly sent back a refusal. When the chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission publicly pointed out the inevitable interpretation that would be put on a continuance of the deadlock, Hosmer reconsidered to the extent of finally agreeing to the conference, but insisted, however, that it should take place in neutral territory. He designated Chicago as the most appropriate point.

I agreed to that, without hesitation, for the more distant city fitted in very nicely with my plans. Hosmer, naturally, didn't travel on our line. But we were able to make careful note of when and how he traveled, just as we were able to verify the fact that he wasn't traveling alone. He and the Swickard woman, we finally discovered, had registered at a discreetly inconspicuous Chicago hotel.

Our first conference wasn't a success. It wasn't intended to be a success. Hosmer still had a leer of triumph on his face when he stepped into that hurriedly organized committee room and it didn't take



me long to see there were to be mighty few concessions on his part. He accused me, in fact, of being the real deadlocker and even indulged in the luxury of relieving his mind of a good deal of the rancor that had been souring there. But, all things considered, I was able to laugh at that. And my quietness seemed to worry Hosmer, leaving him fretting over some nigger in the woodpile he couldn't quite define. He held out to the end, however, and announced, in closing, that since he'd made the effort and come to us, after this we'd have to go to him.

He left us that opening, and we took advantage of it. Skillen—the shrewd head of our legal department—and I, the next morning announced ourselves at Hosmer's second-rate hotel and got up to his shabby red-plush parlor before he knew we were being accompanied by no less than four state and federal officers and a plain-clothes man from the city headquarters. I saw, as soon as I stood face to face with Hosmer, that he'd been drinking, celebrating, I suppose, what he accepted as his initial victory over "Wall Street's office-boy," as he'd recently fallen into the habit of calling me. But his brain wasn't so muddled that he couldn't sense trouble in my presence there, though he laughed openly when I announced that I was giving him his final chance to come to reason.

I could afford to be calm, even in the face of that uncouth scorn of his, for my plan was as clearly laid out as a blue-book road-map. On the yellow oak table in the corner I could see a woman's hat and gloves.

And beyond the inner door I could hear the sound of running water as a tap was turned on and then off again.

Hosmer, who was in his shirt-sleeves, went over to the worn plush sofa in the far corner of the room and picked up his coat. He put it on, slowly and meditatively, and buttoned it up.

"So this is the last call!" he said in his rumbling bass. He even laughed as he eyed me with a stolid sort of indifference. His heavy placidity reminded me of that of a steer being appraised by the eye of a butcher who knows when an animal is ripe for slaughter—while the steer doesn't know he knows.

"It is," I proclaimed, untouched by the wave of angry red that swept up into his face, "the last call!"

"And what's your next move going to be?" he demanded. Yet his eyes narrowed as he noticed Skillen swing a heel back and strike the hall-door against which the latter stood. That, of course, was merely our signal to the men outside.

"The next move, Hosmer," I told him without any undue haste, for I wanted time to get those men inside, "is that you're under arrest for violating the Mann Act."

There was both quick moving and quick thinking in that room during the next few seconds. It came so fast that most of it failed to register, at the moment. I could see, though, how the color went from Hosmer's bony big face and how his eyes darkened with something more than mere hate. But I didn't know.

the fool was heeled until I noticed his hand go down to his side-pocket. I have no clear memory of what he shouted as he brought his blunt-nosed automatic up in front of him, though I remembered with a not unnatural resentment that I was being shot at for the second time in one week. And it was getting monotonous. But that shout of Hosmer's brought the Swickard woman out from the next room. I don't know what she intended to do. I don't believe she knew herself. There are times when I suspect that she'd fallen under the spell of that physical animal and even stood ready to double-cross us at the last moment when she saw her temporary running-mate cornered. There are other times when I try to convince myself that she was loyal to the last and merely tried to fling herself across Hosmer's shooting-arm. But she was in front of him as he fired. The bullet went wild and shattered the glass in the transom over the hall door. He intended to shoot again, I could see, but before his brain could telegraph that intention to his shaking trigger-finger the plain-clothes man they'd lent us from the city headquarters whipped out his service revolver and let go.

The woman, I repeat, may have seen and known what was coming, and yet remained, willing to stand between Wat Hosmer and the bullet intended for him. At any rate, it went into her body. By the time they'd closed in on Hosmer and got his gun away from him she was dead. . . . It was, of course, a tragic and regrettable occurrence. It was equally regrettable that

the first accounts in the afternoon papers described Hosmer as using the woman's body as a human shield, as sheltering himself behind her in the encounter, enlarging on how he had cold-bloodedly swung her in front of him when attacking and attacked by the officers of the law.

It produced a more disagreeable impression even than Hosmer's trial and indictment under the Mann Act. He fought hard, it's true, but we had him pinned down on every corner. The strike fizzed out like a wet time-fuse. There was no one left to pump venom into our men and there was no one to hold the few remaining sore-heads together. And the rest were glad enough to get back in the fold before we reckoned up too closely on our property loss.

When, eleven months later, Hosmer bargained for a commutation on the plea of broken health he was finally given his freedom on the definite understanding that he leave the country and keep out of it. He sailed for Buenos Ayres, joining his brother-in-law in a cattle-raising project in the Argentine. His wife, to whom he seemed still attached in some blind and blundering way, refused to go with him. Nearly two years later, however, when they told her she was dying of nephritis, she sent for him. Hosmer broke his parole and came back to the states. His wife must have forgiven him, for he was with her when she died.

Neither the state nor the federal authorities took any action regarding Hosmer's return. Skillen also sat tight, knowing the man was too widely discredited

in his old circle to work us mischief. He was a strangely broken man.

I saw that, oddly enough, with my own eyes, the raw March day when I happened to stumble across his wife's funeral. It was Kennie's birthday and I held up my inspection-tour long enough to get some flowers and carry them out to the cemetery. The weather was very bad. Tassie, luckily, had insisted that I wear rubbers and a fur-lined overcoat. I remember brushing the wet snow off a granite slab and sitting there thinking of my dead boy and my own youth and the shortness of life, when a funeral procession came in through the winding driveway. It came slowly, for the road was bad and most of the vehicles were drawn by horses. It was Hosmer, I discovered, burying his wife in her old family plot, as she'd asked him to do. He looked like a broken man all right.

If he once caught sight of me he gave no sign of it. He stayed on, in fact, after all the others had gone. He wasn't weeping. He just looked sick and stunned. He seemed to be trying to work out something he couldn't quite understand.

I went over to him. His face clouded when he looked up and saw me. It looked blue and hollow, that bony face with the skin drawn tight over the wide cheek-bones. But, after one stare of tired enmity, he turned away. I sat down beside him. It came home to me, for the first time, that I didn't hate the man. . . . I'm not strong on the emotional stuff. There aren't many who can justly accuse me of slop-

ping over. But something stirred in me. Something disturbed me as I sat there looking at my old enemy. I saw Hosmer as a human being, instead of as a bull with his head down before a red flag. I felt sorry for him.

When I spoke to him a second time he turned away with a movement that was plainly dismissive. So I took a deeper breath and reached out and put a hand on his shoulder, trying to turn him around so I could see him face to face.

He swung about, at last, and stared at me with a dully opaque eye.

*"You go to hell!"* he cried between his broken teeth. That's all he said. But I knew, by the black hate that smoldered in his eyes, that I was only wasting my time. The poison had sunk too deep to be dug out.

## CHAPTER XVII

**J**AVAN PAGE was foolish enough to contest his dismissal. By the time I'd got back to the home office after ironing out the last of our strike wrinkles I found that he'd canvassed the board, lined up a scattering of his financial friends, and demanded a rehearing before the directors. But when a man wakes up to argue about his own funeral arrangements it's too late to admire his energy. When old Asa Caldwell cornered me in the Bankers' Club and started spell-binding for his fellow-Bostonian I cut him short by announcing the issue was a closed one with me. When the talk of financial influences grew a trifle noisier I simply put the matter in Skillen's hands and went about the more important work demanding my attention. I'd a good deal of lost time to make up for and considerable lost ground to recover.

The larger question of our western expansion was once more taking most of my thought. I buried myself in that work, day by day, and the rest of the world became a vague and dream-like shadow. I knew that Newt was convalescing somewhere on the Riviera; I knew that Natalie was still gallivanting around somewhere in the South and getting her picture in an occasional Sunday paper along with the rest

of the pearl-laden beach-combers; I knew that Aggie was out in Pasadena picking her winter roses and hobnobbing with the New Thought lecturers who try to fill empty lives with the artificial flowers of optimism; and I knew my own home was a dark and lonely place where I was daily fed and bedded down like an old work-horse stumbling into his stall.

The one warm spot in all that home emptiness, it seems to me, was Tassie's weekly letter. I got in the habit of waiting for those letters. They were brisk and blithe and chattering epistles, running over with the crazy thoughts all young girls seem to have, but bringing a breath of freshness into those days of dust and toil when I was beginning to feel that I wasn't so young as I once might have been. And no matter how busy my day, I made it a point to answer those letters, on receipt. I tried to match them with a mastodonic blitheness of my own. Tassie must have found something to like in those answers of mine, for she encouraged me in the habit and courageously asked for more. The one week that I was so busy I put off writing till Sunday she called me up on long distance, wanting to know if I was all right, reversing the charges, and costing me three dollars and eighty-five cents in affectionate but frivolous conversation. After that I didn't overlook writing. Without quite knowing it at the time, those letters were doing me good. They kept me from turning from a human being into a locomotive.

I guess, though, I needed to be a bit of a steam en-



gine to pound through that final merger that took us from the Mississippi to the Pacific. It was, of course, something more than a matter of mere dogged driving-power. But unless there'd been the one man with enough steam behind the movement to make the grade, the countless difficulties would never have been overcome.

Our absorption of the Grand Pacific, however, was not romantic. There was little glory in it. It didn't give me any of the thrill of the earlier movements. I don't think I even remembered Old Sam and that last talk with him until long afterward. I was too busy to harp back to the past. And I was tired. I had my game of hide-and-go-seek to play with Wall Street; I had my office-work to keep up: and I had to see that they didn't put anything over on me out along the line where I still knew every yard and every mile along the right-of-way. I succeeded, once we'd cleaned up after the Hosmer mess, in establishing still newer economies in operating, in cutting out dead-wood from the Page office down, in arranging a new and more reasonable wage-scale, and in steadily increasing our car and train loadings. In the matter of coal consumption I organized a further campaign for economy that soon permitted our road to carry a passenger one mile on fourteen and a half pounds of fuel and made our average for moving one thousand gross-ton miles of freight exactly one hundred and thirty-three pounds of coal. This may not sound important to the outsider. But it was on things like that I'd

made my record. The rest of the railway world knew that record—and it was something that counted when it came to beating down the last opposition to our final merger.

That merger, as I've already implied, was largely a matter of adroit financing, mixed with a smaller amount of equally adroit politics, topped with a sufficient amount of timely propaganda, and under-pinned with a rather amazing amount of audacity. And even when the final line-up was arranged the customary group of canny brokers got together and attempted to capitalize the "nuisance-value" of the Grand Pacific minority stock by "holding out to await developments." I spoiled their little game, however, by a formal declaration that no dividend provision would or could be made for the minority stockholders of the original leased company who withdrew or withheld from the transfer conditions already accepted by the majority. In other words, I promptly gave that noisy little minority the choice of joining in the merger and getting good dividends on both their common and their preferred stock or of going into court and discovering how saner minds would interpret their obstructionist tactics.

And while this was hanging fire and a considerable amount of editorial expression, especially in the East, remained still hostile to my new movement, I saw that it was about time for a little pyrotechnical display on my own part. A certain financial paper had referred to me as "a spent rocket" and I liked the idea of show-

ing the owner of that money-rag there was still a show of fizz-powder in his "Cecil Rhodes in shirt-sleeves," as he'd still earlier designated me. So I decided that it would be an appropriate move, all things considered, for my board of directors to proffer me an official banquet. And when that had been duly arranged for, I further suggested that I would esteem it a favor to be allowed to take a small part in its stage-management. And when this too was acceded to I decided to give the affair a touch of the unexpected that might not be without its final good effects. I wanted to bring home to people some little inkling of the part I'd played in their railway world. And I wanted to do it in a way they'd understand.

Back in the old Nagisaw sheds I'd been keeping a nest-egg that very few people knew about. Still fewer understood why I was treasuring it. But when the time seemed right I made use of it.

For that nest-egg was a train of three old wooden day-coaches from the childhood of the D. & B. and the identical old wood-burning engine on which I'd first fired in the Michigan gravel-pits. The grates of this engine had been changed, to adapt it to coal-burning, but I eventually stumbled across a set of the original wood-grates and had them restored to the old-timer. The three day-coaches were bunty little slat-seated traps with oil-lamps and iron end-rails and battered tin water-holders. The yellow paint had peeled from the weathered side-boards and the spiked shoes of frontiersmen had worn the splintered floors into

grooves. They looked like the worn out toys of a rougher and earlier generation.

So when my board of directors in their wisdom and gratitude decided to give me that official banquet I had my little old rattle-bang train brought quietly East and made ready for the occasion. Then, instead of holding our state dinner in a city hotel, as had been at first suggested, I decided to have it on wheels. And instead of having it in our terminal, as the original thought was, I had it twenty-five miles out on the line. There we duly assembled the cream of our new rolling-stock and made up a train that no modern system could outclass. It was made up of the last word in all-steel compartment and club and dining-cars, steam-heated and vestibuled and gold-lettered, carpeted and upholstered in soft tones, palatial and ponderous as a hotel on wheels, equipped with everything that made for luxury and safety. In our club-car were deep-padded seats and books and magazines and pipe-cleaners and oscillating electric-fans and writing-desks. In our compartment-car were automatic window-cleaners and towels under glass to keep them from being tainted with smoke and dust, and insured hot water and shoe-racks outside the compartment-doors with recessed knobs and plate mirrors and nickel plumbing and electrical signal system. In our dining-car that looked like an elongated palace on wheels were tables covered with snow-white napery, with the glitter of silver and glass beneath a tall silver vase in which stood white carnations and maiden-

hair ferns. About these tables stood mahogany chairs upholstered in Spanish leather. The car itself was lighted by indirect electric lighting, with wall sockets for the rose-tinted table lamps, and there was thermostatic control of temperature. The trim was of Mexican mahogany. The ensign of the road was woven into all the table linen and embossed on all the silver. Our porters were in spick-and-span new uniforms and our waiters were in spotless white.

When I looked over that train I couldn't help thinking about the old days and the difference between the old and the new. And I wanted to bring home to a few outsiders just how the railroad operator of today was serving his public.

So when all our guests were assembled in the trainshed I confronted them with the surprise of their lives. I brought the three old coaches and the rusty old wood-burner backing into the shed, with the spool-shaped funnel belching wood-smoke to the roof and the buntz little cars clattering and clumping over the rail-joints. A roar of laughter went up from the crowd, at that unexpected vision from the past, and they were even reluctant to step aboard and dispose themselves along the hard-slatted seats.

But we got them aboard and the little tuppenny engine-whistle blew and the cracked cow-bell rang and we started with a jerk that made every one clutch for seat-backs. Wherever possible I saw to it that we traveled along the rougher sidings, so as to get the full worth of our money. The hot-box we got half-way

out, it is true, was unexpected and accidental, but it was accepted as part of the game and was greeted with the condescending merriment of the modern for the barbarian. I even had my trainmen in the archaic old costumes of Sam Callard's era. And when the president of the First National Bank asked for a drink of water it was given to him in a tin cup.

But the outburst came when we pulled up beside my special vestibuled limited, towering above us on the neighboring track. Those unthinking sons of wealth came tumbling out of their weathered boxes on wheels and stood face to face with the pride of twentieth-century transportation. They lined up along the track-bed and cheered, cheered like children who've seen the magician take the live rabbit out of the hat. And after they had climbed jubilantly aboard my limited and wandered through the softly carpeted corridors and invaded the softly-lighted diner fragrant with flowers and had been made mellow with cocktails and champagne and dined on a meal that might have been the product of a king's *chef*, they took to speech-making and toasting the Spirit of Man and even lifted me up on a chair and clustered around me singing *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*, as though the product of a thousand men's enterprise were something of my own personal invention and as though they weren't some day going to pay for the good time they were having out of their own pockets.

But when the night grew old and the air was heavy with the smoke of Havanas the big Baldwin *Pacific*

hooked on to our front-end and started to move as softly as a young girl's sigh. And before they quite knew it we were slithering off homeward again along a water-level line on one hundred pound rails with scarcely a tremble to the indicator-hand of the oscillation-detector I'd placed above the writing-desk in the club-car.

"Me for the modern way!" cried out a fat millionaire who'd partaken of a little more champagne than was good for him. But I was thinking about the old days, the old rough and wild days, when we traveled on smoke-signals and the man on the "goat" that went scampering down Nippon Hill was less of a hogger and the manager of the matchwood line was less of a hero.

## CHAPTER XVIII

I FIND it hard to say why I got so little glory out of the amalgamation that carried the John Rusk system westward from the Mississippi to the Pacific. That, at one time, had seemed the top of the hill to me, the final height to which I'd aspired. But like most hills that have once been mounted, the summit showed unexpected vistas of uncertainty. Newt, I suppose, would have laid it down to my lack of imagination. He announced to me once that men of action were very seldom men of thought. He may be right. The gods, they say, sell everything at a price. But it's better to keep going than to stagnate. Action, it seems to me, has the power of justifying itself just as running water has the power of purifying itself. If you're working for the future you can't stay soft: even seed-corn has to harden and dry up in order to keep alive.

Our absorption of the Grand Pacific, however, was almost a Pyrrhic victory. We had to pay our price. And that meant some pretty dexterous financing which I needn't here go into. The mere fact that we could seize and swallow such a property carried the natural implication that it was both a depleted and a dilapidated concern. And my plans for its rehabilita-



tion had to be correspondingly extensive and correspondingly expensive.

I knew what I was up against. I'd already projected no less than eleven branch-line extensions, even though my new board kept reminding me that branch-lines in themselves could never be profitably operated. I had also to extend sidings and switching-yards, improve locomotive terminals and undertake a disheartening amount of double-tracking. There were a depressing number of wooden trestles to be superseded by fills and steel bridges, and grades to be reduced, and water facilities to be improved. We needed new rolling stock and motive power, better terminal plants, and a considerable shifting of car-shops and operating-offices. The coordination of two such independent systems, in fact, each with its own traditions and methods and forms, involved the working out of an entirely new standard. And I insisted that the Rusk tradition should dominate.

It would be expedient, I saw, to establish a staff of engineers at headquarters, to work under a capable chief engineer and prepare our new standard plans and specifications for the needed bridges and culverts and buildings, to say nothing of developing uniform methods for the construction and maintenance of these facilities and the issuance of clear-cut instructions to the working-staffs. I wanted this work done close under my eye instead of at the various outlying offices of the engineer, as under the old régime. And I wanted a strong man for my chief engineer.

That brought to a sharp issue the still pending problem of Javan Page's dismissal. There was still vacillation on the part of the board. But time was precious. And they who hesitate are bossed.

So, acting on my own initiative, I ended their foolish bickerings by taking a step which could not be misunderstood. I appointed my own chief engineer. I took McLaren from the Canadian Northern, at a salary that ought to have made Old Sam Callard step out of his grave. But for several years I'd had my eye on McLaren. He was a hard worker who'd been trained in a hard school. He'd pretty well finished up his big job in the north and was eager for wider chances in a wider field. I was able to give him that chance.

The morning after McLaren accepted my offer the official circular went out announcing the appointment. That afternoon Speavey, my chief clerk, came to me with a troubled eye and announced that Mr. Page was back in his office.

"Mr. Page has no office," I reminded Speavey.

"Well, he's in there fussing around his old one," the latter announced. Speavey wore thick-rimmed tortoise-shell glasses that seemed like a pair of shields to protect the thought in his over-candid eyes.

"Tell Mr. Page I'd like to see him," was my immediate order.

I was perplexed, I must acknowledge, by Javan Page's return to headquarters. In it I sniffed both a defiance of my authority and an aroma of those pet-

tier personal conspiracies which incubate themselves in any mixed body of men where feeling runs high.

"Mr. Page says you may see him in half an hour," was Speavey's report to me on his return.

"That *I* may see *him!*" I echoed, for I was used to being obeyed in that row of work-rooms where my word was law. "What business has that man got between these walls, anyway?"

I could still see perplexity in Speavey's over-candid blue eye.

"He said he'd merely come to leave his things in order for a long journey," explained my chief clerk.

"What things?" I demanded.

"I don't know, sir," answered Speavey.

"Then find out," I ordered.

When Speavey went out and closed the door behind him, I turned back to the audit office report on our new Pacific division that had left me wondering when we'd ever get results out there not written in red ink. I was still deep in those figures when Speavey stepped into the room again. I knew that he was standing somewhere close to me, and I also knew that his presence there was a vague annoyance to me. But I didn't look up until he'd addressed me for the second time. The pallor of his face rather startled me. And I noticed that the hand with which he took out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped a moist forehead was trembling.

"A dreadful thing has just happened, Mr. Rusk," he said in a singularly thin and unsteady voice.

I at once thought of my road, of interlacing shuttles that sometimes come together, of implements that do not always respond to human will, of human will itself that has the occasional habit of failing at critical moments.

"An accident?" I barked out. But Speavey shook his head, his head that with its staring eyes made me think of a rabbit's.

"No, it seems to have been carefully thought out," explained my still obscure chief clerk, tugging at his collar as though he stood in need of more air.

"What's happened?" I demanded in no uncertain tone of voice. For my nerves, of late, had not been as steady as they ought to have been.

"It's Mr. Page, sir," was Speavey's reply. "*He's just shot himself in his office!*"

I got slowly up from my chair. Speavey's timidities were an annoyance to me.

"Is he dead?" I asked as I started across the room.

But Speavey had courage enough to catch at my arm.

"I really wouldn't go in, sir," he said as I jerked away from him.

"Is he dead?" I repeated, disturbed by the discovery that my own hand was shaking a little.

Speavey nodded.

"It was right through the head," he explained, illustrating that explanation by pointing an index finger at his own sparsely covered temple. "You shouldn't go, sir!"

But I went.

It was all more orderly than I'd expected. They'd taken up the rug, it's true, and lifted the spick-and-span figure up on the leather covered couch. I noticed the tan-colored spats with the mother-of-pearl buttons, the fastidiously creased trousers, the pointed nails on the listless blue-gray fingers. There was even a white gardenia in the dead man's buttonhole. There was no triumph on his face. But it struck me that there was peace there. It seemed an accusative sort of peace.

I stood there, looking at Javan Page for a long time. It was Al Gillies, I remember, who finally led me back to my office. I snorted at him, I know, when he mildly suggested that I ought to go home for the rest of the day.

I didn't go home. I went through the movements of work, but they were empty movements. I couldn't coerce my mind to the tasks before me. I kept thinking of Javan Page. I kept thinking of the past, of Aurelia Page and the things she'd said and done to me, of Vinnie Page and the hate that would always abide in her heart for me, of my own son Newt and the distance he stood from the father he'd hardened his heart against.

When I got home that night the avenue house seemed empty and lonely and unreal, like a place I'd never got used to, like a place I never could get used to. The hush-voiced servants only added to its desolation. When I went up to my study, after dinner, I

stood for a long time staring at the wall-chart that showed the wavering blood-red line that went from the Atlantic to the Pacific. That line, I remembered, was now an accomplished fact. I had fulfilled my promise to Old Sam and my promise to myself. I had extended my road from tide-water to tide-water. But I wondered, with a listless sort of weariness, if there wasn't some sardonic touch of humor in making it blood-red on that map that looked like a chart of the circulatory system.

I felt colossally tired and colossally alone in the world. I knew, for the first time in my life, that I was an old man. I didn't feel ill, for I didn't believe in illness. My big hulk of a body had carried me through life without much need of repairs. I'd had a little trouble, it's true, with my teeth. And of late my eyes had bothered me a trifle, though our road examiner, in fitting me out with a pair of glasses which half the time I forgot to keep on my nose, declared my visual acuity to be still far above the average. Yet I knew that I'd been "pounding her," as the hogger says of his engine when he works it to a limit beyond that designed by her builders. I felt, for the first time, like a Sante Fe that needed to go into the shops for the attention of something more than a wheel-tapper. After all, I wasn't eternal, as I'd half imagined myself to be. I'd made my run—and I was in need of rest.

I went to bed, but the light that burned at the core of my brain was too bright to let me sleep. I re-

membered I had some old Hudson Bay Company rum that I'd kept stored away for several years, rum given to me by Sir William when I first carried his private car over our midland division. I got up and dug out an imperial quart bottle of that amber-tinted fire and did my best to drown the white light that glowed before me like a semaphore-lamp, that kept glowing even when my eyes were shut. I tried to wash myself away on a river of forgetfulness. But I seemed to bulk too big for the current about me. I couldn't lose myself in it. So I decided to deepen the current.

I was back in Michigan, singing lumber-camp chanteys, when my butler and second footman came up and put me to bed again.

I was tired and weak, the next morning, and my head ached. For the first time in my life I decided to spend a day in bed. It was my new boy, Wallie Enman, who brought the mail and messages over from my office. One of the cables, I noticed, was from my son Newt. It said:

“The execution was most happily timed.”

That cable puzzled me quite a lot. I didn't understand the bitterness behind the thrust until I read the despatch from Paris in the next day's *Times* announcing the marriage of Newt to Lavinia Page.

I don't know whether it was my wall-eyed butler or Wallie himself who got Tassie on long-distance and sent some ridiculous message up to her. But be-

fore the day was over my youngest girl arrived bag and baggage from her boarding-school and announced that she was home, and home for good.

"You've simply got to have somebody look after you, dad," she proclaimed as she pitched her hat and gloves to one side and told Wallie to get all that railway rubbish out of the room.

"What's the matter with me?" I demanded with a show of resentment that didn't go so deep as I wanted it to.

"What's the matter with you?" repeated Tassie, as she inspected me with a judicial eye. "Why, dad, you look like something the cat's carried home."

"I demand respect from my offspring," I said in a voice that made Wallie blink. But Tassie never turned a hair.

"That's all right," she airily announced as she crossed the room and rang the bell and ordered the car for Wallie and a pair of fresh pajamas for me.

Wallie's eye met mine, I remember, and we both smiled. But I guess my smile was the happier of the two, for Wallie was shrewd enough to know that he was being dismissed for the day and I was sane enough to remember that I was going to have a certain soft-handed and soft-voiced little tyrant with me for the rest of the day—and with me, thank God, for the rest of my life.



## CHAPTER XIX

IF TASSIE thought she had a sick buffalo-calf to spoon-feed for the rest of the winter she made the mistake of her young life. The best she could do was to keep me hog-tied to a bed for a couple of days. Then I broke loose. I was needed on the other side of the river. I was needed in Chicago. I was needed out on the line. And I was needed at our new western terminal. I remembered that life-long sense of iniquity which always crept over me when I stood face to face with idleness, and, remembering it, shambled back into harness.

But Tassie never let me get entirely out of her clutches. She planted Wallie Enman beside me in his present secretarial position, primarily, I always suspected, to spy on my comings and goings and report to the home office when I sat up too late or missed a meal or went without my neck-muffler. She encumbered my business car with her presence when I went out on the road and interfered with the operations of my *chef* when he tried to feed me on truck that was considered too rich for a man of my dimensions. She even hampered the administration of a transcontinental system by making me come home earlier in the afternoon and walk with her

around the Reservoir in Central Park. As the days grew longer, in fact, she made me walk around that Reservoir twice. She cut me down to three cigars a day, though I got even by discovering a Tampa corona half as long as my forearm and converting my smokes from local runs into through expresses. She made me wear rubbers in wet weather and laid down an iron-clad rule that no business was to be indulged in after dinner. She made me get measured for a new suit, which I didn't need, and turned the blade in the wound by privately ordering a fish-and-soup outfit which I stubbornly declined to array myself in—at least for a considerable length of time. She rubbed hair-tonic on the top of my head where the forest primeval was getting a little thin and openly rejoiced at the second growth through which she aborted the intent and purpose of Nature. She bought dog-skin gloves for me that were too long in the fingers and silk socks with clocks on that I hide away at the back of my study filing-cabinets. She made board chairmen wait while we looked over the morning paper together and decided which nonsensical comedy or which leg-kicking revue would be the best mental tonic for a Tired Business Man. She nagged me into joining a club which impressed me as a sort of carefully organized torpor for homeless Has-Beens. She dogged my steps and policed my day.

But, the odd part of it is, I liked it. I lost my manhood and was led about like a lamb to the slaughter. I let myself be mollycoddled. And Tassie and I got

acquainted. She was, I discovered, the only member of my family who didn't seem to speak a foreign language. For years back I'd wanted to get to know that family better, but I'd always, in some way, stood beyond the pale. It even hurt me to remember Newt's laugh when he'd overheard me declare that all the religion I owned up to was embodied in the Golden Rule. "Yes, you follow it—a fat lot!" he had said with his quick and careless scorn. And when I thought of Natalie I thought of her as something metallic and remote and disdainful, sniffing at something tainted in my triumph, which seemed to be about as qualified as that of the farm-collie who has met and vanquished the chicken-yard skunk. And when I thought of Aggie I did so, through no fault of my own that I could put my finger on, as of somebody already passed away, as inaccessible by word or touch as a woman in a faded family portrait, as impersonal and pallid as a miniature-face painted on ivory. She was my own wife, the mother of my children, but we had no contacts and no promise of contact. When I asked Tassie, the day after she got the letter from Newt saying he'd settled down in Oxford to write a book and would be satisfied to spend the rest of his life there, why I stood so remote from the people who should have been near me, she retorted that a ship's pilot shouldn't go below to stew tripe. When I requested her to explain that speech she sat down on the arm of my chair and said that the best of my life had gone to the making of a great

dream come true but that she was going to have the rest of it. Then she kissed me. When I did my best to get her back to the subject she merely pulled down my rumpled vest and inspected my old alpaca coat with a clouded eye and said: "Honest, dad, I've got to doll you up!"

Tassie was, indeed, my little replacer. She got me back on the tracks. She kept me from brooding. When I'd try to call myself an old man she'd promptly clamp her hand over my mouth. And when Natalie, in a letter announcing her proposed trip to Europe, referred to me as The Man of Iron her younger sister promptly and volubly resented that charge.

"Do you know what you're like, 'dad?'" she said as she stopped me from taking a second cigar from the humidor she'd given me. "You're like one of those Michigan box-stoves without a mica front. You're warm enough inside, old dear, but you're simply not able to show it!"

So I showed it, then and there, just to prove to her how wide she was of the mark. . . .

I was out on the road when Natalie came north in the spring. She'd sailed for Cherbourg before I got back. It hurt me a little to think that she'd hurried off without waiting for a word with her own father. But Nattie was always Nattie—and the one reminder of her departure was the regal way in which she'd slimmed my roll before she went. When I tried to cross-examine Tassie about her big sister I found the former rather disturbingly unresponsive and evasive.

"Oh, Nattie's got her own salvation to work out," said the worldly-wise young Tassie. It startled me a little to remember that this was precisely the same phrase I'd used in connection with Newt. And the younger generation didn't impress me as geniuses at designing their own careers.

"What's Nattie aiming at?" I inquired, with a show of carelessness.

"I think she's trying to run down a title," answered the none too happy Tassie.

"It seems to me," I ventured when this had filtered through, "that the other party should be doing the running."

"He is," admitted Tassie. "Only, he appears to be traveling the wrong way."

But that was all I could get out of her. Natalie, however, didn't altogether let us forget her. The first thing I knew she'd dumped a Frenchified portrait-painter named Paul Repellier on us, with the demand that he was to do me in oils and leave me to mellow above the fireplace. I naturally opposed the whole thing as a waste of time, for I was busy in a renewed struggle to test the constitutionality of that part of the Transportation Act giving the Railroad Labor Board the power to compel testimony before it. And I knew I hadn't a face to make my descendants thrill with pride when they saw it framed. I even tried to rope Tassie in as the victim. But Repellier explained that he wasn't interested in women, that all he went in for was men, Strong Men. And that

soft-soap probably greased the skids enough to let Tassie and Wallie push me into the thing, after reminding me how well Repellier had done with Alfred and Morgan and Depew.

It bored me, sitting for that bearded effeminate man with the squinting eyes and the white hand that pecked at his canvas like a cockerel pecking at a corn-cob. Two or three times, in fact, I fell fast asleep, and after that Tassie had to read to me to keep me from dozing off and tumbling out of the big arm-chair. I was too passive a factor in that operation to get any joy out of it. I resented the whole thing as a waste of time. But, for Tassie's sake, I saw it through.

I saw it through, but the man, for all his reputation, turned out to be a trickster—at least, to my way of thinking. For he made me as big as a house, with no neck to speak of and hunched-up shoulders still farther blocked out by the line of the chair-back. He made me a cross between an over-weight prize-fighter and a cast-steel ogre with one eye that flamed luminous in the side-light. But the trick was in making me look like one of my own locomotives as your glance first caught the dark mass of the high-shouldered figure with the diminished head and the lower bulk of shadow that looked as though it ought to be between driving-wheels with a cowcatcher in front and a baggage-car behind.

I resented the thing, at first, for it struck me as a good deal of a burlesque. I hadn't asked to be pretti-

fied, it's true, but it's equally true that I hadn't expected to be made into a "mikado." Yet when I got more used to it I began to have a sneaking sort of fondness for it. I especially liked the driving-power he'd put in the Roosevelt-like ham of a hand clamped over the chair-arm.

When Tassie and I first studied it together that girl of mine stood for several minutes without saying a word.

"Well, what do you think of it?" I finally asked, pretending not to notice the little quiver that had crept into her underlip.

"I hate it!" she said with her fists clenched.

"But it's *Me*, isn't it?" I demanded.

"It's not the *Me* in you that *I* know," she declared as she confronted the tired-eyed Repellier with what was clearly a look of hate.

So we carried the portrait off home about the same as you carry back a dog who's bitten somebody, and broke Repellier's heart by not allowing it to be exhibited. Yet, oddly enough, Tassie herself rather grew to like the thing as she got better acquainted with it.

"It makes you look as though you'd been made out of metal," she explained, "but it seems to hint that somewhere behind the metal there's a great fire hidden away."

"It ought to have a whistle and a sand-box," I solemnly interrupted.

"And a great fire means a great force," Tassie went

on without noticing my interruption. "And you have that. And it's something they can never take away from you!"

That girl of mine may have been right, but I had my doubts about it as the year grew older and the job of keeping my new organization intact took every jot of the time and energy I could give it. When the letter came from Natalie explaining that she had been quietly married in Florence to Count Giovanelli I was so immersed in the problem of our new bond issue that I had small time either to bask in the thought that we could now call our Nattie a countess or to question why all my offspring seemed to prefer entering into the holy state of matrimony on the other side of the water. I noticed, however, that Tassie was rather depressed by the news. She seemed equally cast down when Nattie, in a letter which came a month later, explained that they were going to live in Geneva and that they'd both feel relieved if arrangements could accordingly be made with the Swiss bankers as promptly as possible. I knew pretty well what that meant—for when an American girl gets a foreign title it naturally has to be paid for, the same as a foreign car is paid for. And the arrangements were accordingly made.

At the end of my inspection tour that fall Tassie complained that I hadn't been getting enough exercise and that I wasn't as good a color as I ought to be. She even went so far as to suggest that I be looked over by a specialist, after I'd complained of a twinge



or two between the shoulder-blades. But I put my foot down, at that, and proclaimed that it would be many a day before they rolled me into the repair-shops. I was as rugged as I ever was. I ate well and felt well. I could still pound through my day's work without a moment's let-up. But sometimes, especially toward night, I was troubled by a ringing in my ears. Sometimes, too, the sound of a pulse in my head against the pillow kept me awake. And when I climbed a stairway or moved too quickly, I noticed, I often experienced a brief but oppressive sense of tightness somewhere under the breastbone.

It was one Sunday when Tassie and Wallie were motoring out to Rye and I'd wandered over into Central Park that a small but disturbing thing happened to me. I was walking along with a sense of well-being in the early winter sunlight when a small bell seemed to ring somewhere at the back of my brain and I had a strange feeling, like that of a curtain being lowered somewhere in my head, a curtain that seemed to cut one part of my mind off from the other. A foolish little panic ran through me as I puzzled over this. It disturbed me, as out-and-out bad news or an earthquake disturbs a man. I thought it would be as well, on the whole, to turn homeward and take a peg of something to steady my nerves. But for the life of me I couldn't remember where I was. The wires seemed down between me and the rest of the world.

I stopped and asked a policeman.

He looked at me in an impersonally estimative sort of way and asked me what my name was.

I couldn't tell him.

He stepped closer, to see, I suppose, if he could sniff alcohol on my breath. But, failing in that, he stood scratching his head in perplexity. Then, as impersonally as though I were a dead man in a morgue, he unbuttoned my coat, took out my pocketbook, and read aloud the name and address I'd been so foolishly and frantically groping for.

"That's me!" I said with a sigh of relief. And I repeated my own name over and over again, like a child petting a lost pup that has just been returned to him.

"I guess I'll be stopping this taxi for you," suggested the mild-eyed man in blue, after paternally buttoning up my coat again. He even tried to help me into the cab. But I resented the pitying sort of patience that had crept into his movements and promptly shook myself free from his hands. I announced my destination to the driver, without hesitation, and reached my own home and walked up my own steps without touch or trace of the old uncertainty. The nameless little curtain, whatever it may have been, had lifted again.

But when Tassie got back, a couple of hours later, I made it a point not to mention the incident to her.

## CHAPTER XX

THERE is, of course, an element of chance in any enterprise so exposed to the moods of nature as is a North American railway system. Certain powers stronger than man are apt to step in and remind him that he is merely a worried little ant on the road-bed of mightier designs. But the ant keeps moving. And man, double-crossed and defeated, flings himself into the old battle and takes up the old weapons and tastes the glory of going on, of going on at any cost.

After our spectacularly triumphant scramble for the autumn wheat-haul and a record in general operation that made the older heads along the seaboard sit up, we were abruptly reminded that running a transcontinental system wasn't all lavender. For an early December blizzard whisked down out of the Medicine Hat district, and, gathering force as it came, did its best to get a strangle-hold on our old midland division. The first messages that came in seemed merely the reports of the usual winter storm that occasionally lands in the lap of the Great Lakes. But when our wires went down and our work-trains got lost and our through freights started to curl up and die like frozen kittens I woke up to the fact that my old enemy, Father Snow, was trying his best to beat me at the old

game. When my divisional superintendent reported a suspension of passenger-traffic and two of his locomotives and a snow-plow in the ditch I decided it was about time to take a hand of my own in that little affair. The thought of getting back to my old stamping-ground, in fact, rather appealed to me. I relished the idea of returning to the scene of my earliest railway fighting and showing the younger generation that there was still a little life left in the old boy. And I was just starting west on a special, with the best and speediest engine of the roundhouse hooked on to my business car, when Tassie appeared on the platform.

Something about her face disturbed me. I thought, at first, that she had come to try to stop me from going out on the road.

"What's bothering you, Bunty?" I asked as I drew her into the warm car.

"It's about Natalie," she said. "She's just cabled me from Paris."

"Any of the crowned heads been cutting her?" I inquired in an effort to joke away the frown from Tassie's thoughtful face.

"I imagine she's had all she wants of that stuff," observed the troubled girl in front of me.

"Then she wants more money?" I suggested.

"Yes, she'll have to have money," announced that firm-lipped young daughter of mine. "For she seems to be in an awful mess, dad. She hasn't said anything about it, until now. But Giovanelli has turned out a—a rotter. He's not even a count."

"That means she's leaving him," I interrupted, knowing Nattie as I did.

"Don't be hard on her, dad," cried Tassie in a tone that was almost impatient. "She's left him already. Months ago, before we knew it! She left him when she found out he already had a wife. She's been waiting in Paris until the French courts could get through her annulment. She's been over there alone, with all that bitterness to endure, with all that disgrace to live down. It doesn't seem quite fair!"

It wasn't quite fair. But I had a line to keep open. And they couldn't hold my train much longer.

"What d' you want me to do?" I asked of the solemn-eyed girl beside me.

"I think you ought to cable Natalie and tell her to come home. Tell her it's all right and that you want her home. We've—we've all got to have something to live for, you know. And Nattie and you'll both find it easier to get along now."

"You mean we're both getting halter-broke!" I cynically announced. But the wounded look in Tassie's eyes took the bitterness out of my voice. "Sure, send that cable for me," I said as I helped her down the bronze steps. "Tell Nattie we want her home. Tell her she still belongs to us and we're waiting to see her back. And tell her to get in touch with Jansoulet of our Paris office and explain just what she needs. I'll have Wallie confirm things from the New York end. And don't let anybody touch those papers up on my study desk until I get back. Good-by!"

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" asked Tassie as we got under way.

"Yes—twice!" I proclaimed. But she had to run along the cement platform, to get them, while I bent low over the bronze-railing. A diamond-pusher on a yard-engine laughed and waved a mittened hand as he saw the girl in furs reach up for the second smack.

She was standing alone, looking after me through a thin cloud of steam, when I caught my last glimpse of her and turned in to the car to get busy on the sheaf of wires awaiting my attention. . . .

It seemed another world, the next day when we'd beaten our way up to the snow belt, a remote and yet an oddly familiar world where still again the old grim battle of keeping the line open had to be fought out and fought out to the end. They'd already pulled off the snow-freights and run the perishable-freight trains in on the sidings and concentrated our motive power on the plows and what remained of the passenger service. We had to follow the old procedure of cutting off cars and adding power—and I thanked God that the newer era gave us engines of decent hauling-ability. Yet everything that moved moved double-headed, and with flangers attached. When the snow kept on and the drifting grew worse I put as many as three of my heaviest engines behind one rotary and sent her roaring and bucking and boring into the hardening blue-white banks along our right-of-way until she looked like a cyclone going through a cotton field. When they backed down and

said they couldn't make Nippon Hill I ordered them out again at daybreak, with a new engine from the roundhouse to replace the big mikado that had gone lame in the fight. When they gave up for the second time I lost patience with them and mounted that rotary and took command myself.

We were out for two days.

We bucked and roared and tunneled our way deeper and deeper into that drifted wilderness of white. We hand-shoveled and pick-axed and broom-swept and flange-plowed and mined for lost switches and resurrected buried yard lamps and made room for the triple-engined rotary to sink its teeth into the deeper snow like a Coliseum lion sinking its teeth into a Christian martyr. For two nights we stayed up, drinking coffee out of tin pails and thawing out in the engine-cabs and wondering why all the snow in the world was centering on one harried stretch of Michigan.

But we won out in the end. We got the line open and kept her open. We revictualled three hungry towns and kept sending a six-car train over the road every ninety minutes, with a flange-plow up front, until the drifting stopped and the side-tracked freights began to crawl out of their sleeping-blankets and move on to the world where they belonged.

And when it was all over I felt triumphant but tired. It was a strange sort of tiredness, a brain-weariness that set a violet-colored light to wavering before my eyes, even when I kept them shut. The thinking part of me seemed in some way detached from my own

body, so that I had the delusion of sitting above myself and looking down at my own tingling carcass in about the same fashion that a robin looks down at the nest it has just hopped out of. I don't think I slept much, on the way home, though sleep seemed the one thing I craved, to end that inner sense of tension which made me feel like a bow that was being pulled back to the breaking-point.

Tassie wasn't home when I got back to the house. And I wanted her without being quite able to explain just why I wanted her. I wasn't exactly ill, but there was a hornet buzzing against the window-pane of my brain, buzzing and fretting as though he wanted to break his way out. And somewhere at the core of my being was a never-ending, crawling canker of depression that perplexed and mystified me, a continuous sense of impending doom that couldn't be defined, a stubborn clouding of the soul that couldn't be put into words. . . .

I know a little more about blood-pressure now than I did in those earlier careless days when I pounded the engine of life until, in the language of the bull-pen, I finally made her pop. For the dyke broke, some time during that black hour when Tassie found me on the floor beside my wall-chart and wondered, as she had me put to bed and sent for her specialist, why I couldn't answer her when she spoke to me. I'd stumbled on to the discovery that I wasn't invulnerable, that I wasn't invincible. A fuse blew out. I'd been conquered by something inside my own walls. The brain that had



planned and schemed and contrived to vanquish its marshalled enemies had gone down because of a small break, like the break in an air-line. I imagined myself secure, continuous. I thought I'd built on a rock, but it turned out to be a whale's back.

For a month and more, after that little hemorrhage of the brain which reminded me I was mortal and subject to mortal laws, I was about as far away from my old world as though I had died and balanced up my ledger with the Final Bookkeeper. The works came to a standstill, so far as I was concerned. Then the clot, which showed every sign of being a small one, began to be absorbed. So I was put aboard my private car and carried out here to Pasadena, where my patient-eyed Aggie read *New Thought* to me until I was able to slip away from her and wander down to the summer-house beyond the lily-pond. Then I accumulated a little more courage and escaped as far as the fire-hall, where I played quoits with the happy-hearted smoke-eaters. And only last week I openly disgraced Tassie and Wallie by joining my quoit-throwing friends on the hose-reel and answering an alarm from Millionaire Row.

. . . I'm getting a good deal of fun out of life, for a man who's supposed to have one foot in the grave. And I'm not defeated yet, not by a long shot. I may not have both shoulders back in harness, but I've got a newer perspective on that battle-field of mine up north and I've begun to realize that a good general is known by the adjutants he picks. If the younger hot-heads

want to wolf all the hard work in the world, let 'em gallop to it! There's still glory enough to go round. And I'm getting an Indian-Summer sort of satisfaction in becoming better acquainted with this family of mine.

My contact with Newt, it's true, is rather a long-distance one, for he's stuck to his earlier decision to settle down in Oxford. I didn't get a copy of his first book, *Mortals and Portals*, for the simple reason that Newt didn't see fit to honor his old dad with one. But a couple of weeks ago Tassie skipped in with *Sleeping Sentinels*, my boy's second volume, and I've gone through it page by page and shown it around and pretty well bored people by reading out the parts I liked best. For that's a great little book of Newt's. The *London Standard* gave it two-thirds of a column. There's some of it I can't quite get through this thick head of mine, but I'm going to keep at it, hammer and tongs, until the light comes to me. I'm going to make the grade there or blow up. For when a paper like the *Standard* says your son is a New Voice in the choir of the Newer Era it's up to an old hard-head like me to get wise to what the lad's driving at. He may come back some day, that boy of mine, and I want to be able to meet him on common ground. He may be right, after all, in his claim that "Success spoils people." But I've got a lot to learn before I can openly exalt the nobility of failure and sermonize about the vulgarity of success. I've a weakness for the go-getters. I've a liking for the Cecil Rhodes type of man, the map-builder and empire-maker and continent-conqueror—though

I still can't understand why that big battler was willing to shorten an already short life by nightly losing time in childish games of chance, any more than I could understand why a giant like Van Horne could piffle around with little oil-paintings. Perhaps it kept them from being lonely. For when a worker gets away from his work, when that's all he knows, he's about as desolate as a lost dog shut up in a woodshed.

But, thank God, I've still got Tassie and Wallie. I can give them more time, now that I've dropped back into second, and I can get about as much fun out of planning and scheming for those kids as I once did out of fighting for myself. I even trump up excuses for getting out on the road and the three of us slip off in the business car and go rampaging around the country enjoying ourselves. We pretend, of course, that we're knee-deep in important official business. But that business, of late, doesn't seem so close to me. It has taken on a vague and misty outline, like the fields of toil an old farmer looks out on through softening and mystifying moonlight.

And speaking of moonlight reminds me that as we hummed homeward last night through a balmy southern valley that smelled of acacia and orange-blossoms, with a moon as golden as the moon that hung over us the night that Aurelia Page and I stood beside the music of Angel Spray Falls, I caught sight of Tassie and Wallie out on the rear-end. They were sitting close together, with their feet up on the bronze rail and their arms around each other. I saw their two heads move closer and merge, black against the moonlight.

They stayed that way for a disturbing length of time. They made one undivided and indisputable silhouette. And it came home to me, for the first time, just what it meant. They were away, in a world of their own, in a world where I couldn't go along, where I couldn't hope to follow them. And it sounds foolish, I suppose, but the old ache of desolation grew so sharp in my heart that I had to get up and walk back and forth, to keep the lump from coming up into my throat and shutting off the air I still needed for breath.

But I got myself in hand, and lit a cigar, and sauntered out to the canopied platform where Tassie sat in the moonlight with her head on Wallie's shoulder.

She didn't move when she saw me there beside her. She merely reached out one hand and caught hold of my two thick fingers and squeezed them between her slender ones. And I was able to laugh down at the two of them, as I spoiled the smell of orange and acacia with my cigar-smoke.

"I guess, from the looks of things," I announced, "I'm going to lose a daughter."

But Tassie drew me over closer to them, so that the three of us made a triangle.

"No, dad," she said with a laugh that had a quaver in it. "You're gathering in a son!"

"But is he any good?" I said with a grin, trying to joke away the ache that had no business to be in my heart.

"I'll tell the world he is!" announced the happy and unsuspecting Tassie.

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